

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF A WOMAN SOLDIER



LIEUTENANT SANDES SITTING ON "KAISER'S SEAT" IN THE  
GRAD, BELGRADE,

*(Frontispiece)*



# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

*A BRIEF RECORD OF ADVENTURE  
WITH THE SERBIAN ARMY, 1916-1919*

*By*  
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*ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS*

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## CHAPTER I

### EXCHANGING THE RED CROSS FOR A RIFLE

To Serbia as a Nurse—Collecting Supplies—Typhus  
—Close to the Front—The Albanian Retreat—  
Salonique—Taking the Field again.

When a very small child I used to pray every night that I might wake up in the morning and find myself a boy.

Fate plays funny tricks sometimes, so that it behoves one to be careful of one's wishes.

Many years afterwards, when I had long realized that if you have the misfortune to be born a woman it is better to make the best of a bad job, and not try to be a bad imitation of a man, I was suddenly pitchforked into the Serbian Army, and for seven years lived practically a man's life.

Little did I imagine what Fate was hiding up her sleeve for me when the Great War broke out, and I joined Madame Mabel Grouitch's little unit and went out to Serbia as a nurse—surely the most womanly occupation on earth.

Our little unit of seven nurses left London on August 12th, 1914, just a week after War had been declared.



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I was not a trained nurse, but had been for three years an active member of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade, so had some idea of the rudiments of First Aid, and now had the advantage of working under a fully trained nurse.

On our arrival in Serbia, after three weeks' travelling, we spent the first three months working under Serbian surgeons in a large Military hospital in Kragujevatz, a small town in the centre of the country.

Our contract was for three months—when it was supposed that the War would be over—and at the end of that time I returned to England, with the approval of the Serbian Red Cross, to try and raise money for supplies, there being such a terrible shortage in the Serbian hospitals. Miss Simmonds, an American nurse in our unit, came with me, and she returned to New York to do the same thing.

Through the courtesy of the "Daily Mail," who published a letter I wrote making an appeal for the Serbs, I raised—to my utter astonishment—over two thousand pounds in three weeks. Half of this was given me in a lump sum by the Baltic Exchange, and the rest by small subscriptions. I put every penny of it into absolutely vital necessities—gauze, cottonwool, iodine, etc., bought through the British Red Cross, who were kindness itself to me. They not only gave me all my freight and packing free, but vouched for me to the passport Authorities, who, at first, demurred about my passport, because I was now a free-lance working for the Serbian Red Cross in Serbia, and not with any British unit.

Miss Simmonds rejoined me, and we convoyed my 120 tons of material to Serbia, arriving at the beginning



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of February, 1915, in the middle of the typhus fever epidemic which was raging throughout the country, and carrying off thousands of the population.

We were at once sent, with most of our supplies, to Valjevo, a small town where practically the whole population was down with typhus. The hospitals were full up with soldiers, there was no room for civilians, and besides the sick there were numbers of men wounded, with frostbitten, gangrened feet.

Owing to nearly all the doctors in the town being down with typhus, we—the only English-speaking women in the town—were given charge of the operating room in the hospital to which we were detailed, and consequently had to pull ourselves together and do all the operations and dressings ourselves as best we could. There was no time for much actual nursing.

Of course we both got typhus fever; in fact, an American doctor, whom we met on our way to Valjevo, told us that if we would go there he would give us just one month to live, as the mortality was 70 per cent. As far as I was concerned, his forecast very nearly proved correct. There was so much work to be done, however, that as soon as we were on our feet again, we had to carry on. So, by the end of September, feeling in need of a rest, the epidemic now being over, and everything quiet at the Front, we came home for a spell.

I had only been home a few weeks when the Bulgarians declared war against Serbia, and in October I hurried back, via Salonique, to rejoin the Serbian Red Cross.

The Bulgarians had cut the railway line, and it being impossible to get up into Serbia from Salonique I applied



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for, and obtained, permission to go as a dresser to the Ambulance of the Second Infantry Regiment, the nearest one I could get to. It was fighting at Baboona Pass, near Monastir, or Bitol to call it by its Serbian name, in Southern Macedonia, and trying to hold the road open to Salonique for the refugees.

My education in the various aspects of War was proceeding with a vengeance. Had I gone out as a newspaper correspondent and with that express purpose it could not have been more varied. What I had previously imagined to be a hard, rough life in Kragujevatz Hospital—living seven in one small room and sleeping like the soldiers on a straw mattress with one army blanket—I now looked back upon as absolute comfort in comparison to a bed of hay in a Regimental Ambulance in winter, close up to the Front. Even this in its turn was soon to become a memory of luxury and ease.

The Serbian Army was slowly being driven back by overwhelming numbers. The Germans and Austrians were pressing them from the north, the Bulgarians from the east; and the south being blocked by Greece, still neutral, the only way of retreat lay through the Albanian mountains, unless it would accept the separate peace offered to it, which it scorned to do.

Looking back, I seem to have just naturally drifted, by successive stages, from a nurse into a soldier.

The soldiers in the Ambulance seemed to take it for granted that anyone who could ride and shoot, and I could do both, would be a soldier, in such a crisis. To their minds there was nothing particularly strange about a woman joining up, there had occasionally been Serbian peasant girls in the army, and there was

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one in this same regiment. The only thing that distinguished me particularly, and made them treat me with so much affection and respect, was the fact that I, an Englishwoman, was willing to rough it with them, and to fight for Serbia. Like the Turks they say, "to die for your country is not to die"; but to die for someone else's country they thought to be something extra special.

So, when the brigade holding Baboona Pass began slowly to retreat towards Albania, where there were no roads, and we could take no ambulances to carry the sick, I took the Red Cross off my arm and said, very well, I would join the 2nd Infantry Regiment as a private.

When the "commandant" of the regiment, Colonel Militch, laughingly took the little brass figure "2" off his own epaulettes, and fastened them on the shoulder-straps of his "new recruit," as he called me, it seemed a "fait accompli," and official sanction came when we reached Bitol before going into Albania. There Colonel Militch took me with him to Colonel Vasitch, the commandant of the division, and he told me that, though I could even then get back to Salonique by the last train leaving that night, it would be better for the Serbs if I joined the army and went through Albania with them, as the simple peasant soldiers already looked upon me as a sort of representative of England, and a pledge, and if I stuck to them it would encourage them, and strengthen their belief that in the end England would help them.

For me it sounded too good to be true, having fully expected to be ignominiously packed back to Salonique as a female encumbrance.



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There was a young Greek there also, who was begging to be allowed to join the army, but the commandant would have none of it, and told him he would have no foreigners, although, as the Greek indignantly pointed out, he was taking me. Evidently he had his reasons; probably he did not trust him.

An hour after this interview I found myself a full-fledged private—but a private to whom the colonel had lent his second horse, at night, and in midwinter—slowly heading for the desolate Albanian mountains, with the rest of my new comrades-in-arms.

I had been a little doubtful as to how the British, and especially soldiers, might look upon the action of their unofficial "representative," so I was very glad when the British Consul from Bitol, Mr. Greig, and an English officer who had come up to the regiment to see the colonel a few days before, both commended it, and Captain O'Grady told me to stick to it. Captain O'Grady's little visit that day was our last link with England, and when he left he gave the colonel a silver cigarette case, as a souvenir, with best wishes for better days. The colonel was most awfully pleased, as it was the captain's own case with his monogram. Thereafter it was his constant companion, and many is the cigarette I have had from it.

For an Englishwoman to be fighting side by side with them seemed to please the soldiers immensely, and I soon became well known, the men always calling me "*Nashi Engleskinja*", *Our Englishwoman*.

Much has been written about that heroic Retreat of the Army through Albania, and in a previous little book, "*An English Woman Sergeant in the Serbian Army*,"

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I have already told something of this, and also of life with the Ambulance. At the end of that little book I told how the Serbian Army—what was left of it—was being re-equipped in Salonique in the summer of 1916, to take the field again against the Bulgars, and to demonstrate to them that, in spite of what it had been through, the spirit of Serbia was still unquenchable. I also said that some day I hoped to be able to tell the tale of how we marched victoriously back into, and across, Serbia. And here it is.

For two and a half years later I did march with that war-worn but triumphant army, but at what a cost in Serbian lives, and into what a devastated country.



## CHAPTER II

### APPRENTICESHIP IN WAR

1916 Campaign—Asking a foolish question—  
Disillusionments of a first advance—The herd instinct—  
Two letters that were never posted.

My memories of the 1916 campaign are confused. They seem like a whole series of vivid pictures of little incidents which I can never forget, but which are not consecutive.

With the help of my very scrappy diary, however, I hope to be able to make some kind of a whole of them, beginning in mid-August heat with the 2nd Regiment, numbering some 3,000 and odd men, and ending in November snows with a bare 500. The triumphant taking of Bitol, the capital of Macedonia, which ended the offensive, I did not see, having been knocked out two days before.

Scorching days followed by freezing nights, when we lay on the bare mountainside in clothes soaked with perspiration, and shivered, with no covering but our overcoats. Incessant fighting, weariness indescribable, but hand-in-hand with romance, adventure and comradeship, which more than made up for everything. Days and weeks went by during which one never took one's boots off; always on the alert, contesting every inch of the way; steadily driving the Bulgars from the positions on one mountain-top after another. Daily increasing casualties among officers and men, who not

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only called me "Brother"—the usual term of address among Serbs—but whom I had grown to look upon as such in the close camaraderie of the Albanian Retreat. In the "Iron Regiment"—our nickname—I served my apprenticeship in war with a vengeance, and my tough and hardy comrades, most of them young veterans of two previous wars, taught me how to be a Serbian soldier.

The actual man at the Front knows less than anyone how the war is progressing, or indeed anything beyond his own immediate environment. For us, our own company was the hub of the Universe, particularly our own platoon. Next to that we understood more or less the movements of our own battalion, rather more vaguely still those of the entire regiment, and beyond that practically nothing. As far as we were concerned, defeat or victory depended on how the 2nd Vod (Platoon) 4th Company, 1st Battalion, fought and conducted itself.

By the end of that three months I had begun to feel as though I had never known any other kind of life, for I seemed to take to soldiering like a duck to water (perhaps I may have been one in some previous life) and I can still laugh at myself when I remember the question I asked on the first night we went into action.

We had been told to hold ourselves in readiness all day, and then suddenly—so suddenly that even Vukoje, our vodnik (platoon officer) was taken by surprise—at 5.30 p.m., without any further warning, we got the order and said good-bye to kit-bag, blanket and everything except rifle, ammunition and knapsack. To my great surprise we suddenly marched off, as though we



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were going to stop the whole Bulgarian Army, though there were no signs of an enemy as far as I could see.

Later on I began to realize that these sudden sprints were the rule and not the exception; so that no wonder it was never safe to take one's boots off. At first I used always to be thinking someone would come and tell us at what time we were going, whereas of course no one ever told us anything, our business being to go where we were told, and to go quick. It might be for ten minutes, or it might be for ten hours or days, for all we knew.

On this first and particular occasion we dashed down a stony hillside, through a stream at the bottom, and up the other side. Just after we started artillery fire broke out somewhere ahead of us, followed at once by the cracking of rifles and bursting of bombs, and we were apparently making a bee-line for the scrap; the noise and the flashes increasing every moment as we neared it.

It was now quite dark, as there is no twilight in those parts, and we were all blown and streaming with perspiration from the gruelling pace at which our vodnik, a long-legged 2nd lieutenant, was taking us.

I was in pretty good condition, but, just as I was beginning to wonder whether I could possibly stay the pace till we reached those flashes, our vodnik suddenly halted us at a little line of "funk holes" dug near the crest of the hill.

It was my first real advance; for hitherto all my experiences had been confined to retreating slowly in Albania, and as I ran I had been picturing to myself

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a tremendous scrap. Hand-to-hand fighting with the bayonet, and our crowd arriving breathless and in the nick of time; covering ourselves with honour and glory by turning the tide, and helping to win a most important engagement.

I suppose many soldiers have pictured their first battle as something in the same way, and, probably for thousands, their dreams of glory and devilment have fizzled out as mine did, sitting in pouring rain, and up to the knees in wet slush, without hearing another shot fired all night. Presumably we had been sent up only as reserves, but we might amuse ourselves by surmising what we liked, for if our vodnik knew he did not tell us.

Later on I heard that the first man from the regiment to be killed in this little minor scrap, as it turned out to be, was a young officer who had been playing cards with myself and a couple of others only an hour before.

The little "funk-holes" were just big enough for two people to sit in, and were already half full of water and mud.

"Where are we going to sleep?" I asked Vukoje.

"Sleep?" he echoed vaguely, "why, here of course." I looked at the squelchy, black mud, and sat down gingerly beside him, without further comment.

I carried a little notebook in my tunic pocket, and whenever I had time would jot down in a few words the events of the preceding day and night. As my first impressions are blunted now, I think I cannot do better than put down just what I wrote in my diary for this particular night. A sample of dozens of others.

"Slept a bit. About 1 a.m. order came to go forward



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again. Cold, pouring buckets and blowing, awfully rough going on the hills. Got to the top of a stony rise where we lay on the stones on our tummies in pelting rain, with rifles and bombs ready, but nothing happened, then forward again, blowing a gale and pitch dark, across some fields, and up a stony hillside. Awfully cold at dawn and pretty wet, but managed to sleep for all that in my overcoat, no blanket; all that has to stay behind with the Komorra (mute transport). Breakfast, cold stew, brought to us at 6 a.m. As soon as sun got up, roasting hot, no shade. Stayed there on one spot till about 2 p.m."

This is an unusually full entry. As a general rule my diary for each day seems to have consisted only of two or three scrawled pencil lines, noting which companies made connection with ours on our immediate right or left flank, and with whom we had to keep in touch, followed by a remark that the bread (frequently our only ration) had not turned up, or that we got some cold stew at . . . . . The fighting I seem rarely to have commented on, beyond the brief mention of the name of some special friend killed, or whether we had, or had not, taken a position. Nothing of any interest, of course, could be written down, in case one were taken prisoner.

In this sort of terrain the shells used to make the most appalling din, bursting on the rocks and scattering them in every direction, whilst the echoes kept up a continual reverberation among the mountains, growing fainter and fainter, but never wholly dying away before the next shell fell and echoes started anew. For some reason prolonged shelling always made me feel sleepy. The louder the racket the more soundly I slept.

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One day we were waiting as reserves, while a terrific bombardment was going on just below us. The colonel, prowling round, passed me curled up under a rock fast asleep, and was much amused. "You must indeed be an 'old soldier' if you can sleep through that," and no longer my 'new recruit'," he said to me afterwards.

As there were no trenches, or deep dugouts, all we could do, when we got caught in a place without cover, was to lie flat on our faces, bury our heads in our arms, and grin and bear it. I was so tired that the moment I lay down I fell asleep, and then used to have visions of waking up and finding myself all alone. This idea persistently pursued me in my sleep. Whenever I dreamed it was always the same terrifying incident: that I had lost the platoon, and was wandering by myself over the mountains, in the dark. When awake I did not mind anything much.

Of course, nothing is so bad when there are plenty of others quite close to you, all doing the same thing, which I suppose accounts for that fatal tendency, leading men to bunch up together under shellfire, instead of scattering as they should.

One day my vod had to advance across a long open slope which was being heavily shelled. We had to leave a sheltered place behind some big rocks, and emerge through a gap in a wall straight into the enemy's fire. Our vodnik ordered us to go in single file, ten paces between each man, and to run as hard as we could. He stood at the gap to shepherd us through one by one, and see that none stayed behind. Big Sergeant Miladin, my great pal, sprang forward to give them a lead, and I followed hard on his heels. He was a tremendously



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big fellow, about 6 feet 4 inches, a splendid soldier, and first at everything. Both of us, being sergeants, we were always together, and he told me always to stick close to him in a scrap, whatever happened, and that I should not get taken prisoner as long as he was alive. Their great fear was always that I might get taken prisoner. The Bulgarians torture their prisoners.

His long mountaineer's legs carried him over the shell-swept ground considerably faster than mine, though I was legging it as hard as I could, whilst he glanced over his shoulder every now and again to satisfy himself that I was still following all right. When finally we flung ourselves panting in the shelter of a little mound on the other side there was no sign of a single other man of our vod. The shelling had increased with such violence after we had started that, we found afterwards, the vodnik had kept the rest back waiting for a lull. As far as we could see there was not another soul in sight, and we devoutly hoped nothing would keep the rest from eventually joining us. Suddenly, a head appeared from behind a near-by rock, and a tremulous voice enquired who we were.

"4th Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment," we answered cheerfully.

"*All* of it?" the man asked incredulously.

"*All* of it."

"Well, I'm coming over to die with the 4th Company, such as it is. I don't want to be killed all by myself," said the soldier. Scrambling over the rocks, and explaining that he had lost his own company, he wedged himself in between us with a sigh of relief at having human companionship once more.

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Bushels of Bulgarian revolvers and field-glasses were collected by the second line clearing up after us that day, but we ourselves had no time to stop for anything.

One detachment of Bulgarians we came upon in a little hollow behind some rocks was a gruesome sight. Several of our shells must have burst there in quick succession, for there was not a man left alive. Some were blown to bits, but one group of four men seated round a still blazing camp-fire must have been killed simply from concussion. There was something cooking in a pot on the fire, and so perfectly natural were their attitudes that I thought at first sight they were still alive.

I lost my little batman, Dragoutin, that day, too. He was most devoted, always close beside me, and, I believe, would cheerfully have given his life for mine if occasion had arisen. I suddenly missed him, and one of the others said he believed he had been wounded. I turned back at once to look for him, and found him a little farther back with one of the ambulance men, who was chaffing him about the fuss he was making. It was only a flesh wound in the leg, and I was relieved to see that he *was* making a fuss, as the man who has strength left to bellow, though he may be in severe pain, is never very bad. The really dangerous case is the fellow who says nothing at all, or only groans a little. So brutal does one unconsciously become, that when we used to creep out at night on a bombing raid, we always congratulated ourselves on being most successful when the crash of our bomb was followed only by a few groans and then silence. Were there a tremendous hullabaloo, we used to say in disgust that in all probability it meant



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only a few scratches, or the top of someone's finger—a very sensitive place—taken off.

Turning out an old pocket-book the other day I found two letters written in pencil at the Front, and then thrust into my pocket in a hurry, and never sent. One could only send letters if one could get them to the adjutant at the Regimental Staff, H.Q., to be given to the next messenger going

I am copying these letters, as, being written on the spot, they give a more exact idea of what I felt at the time than anything I can write now, and are a truthful picture of the dogged, unheroic, matter-of-fact attitude of mind of most of the men at the Front.

4th Co., 1st Battn., 2nd Inf. Reg.,  
Sector Postal No. 8,  
Serbian Army.  
*October 14th, 1916.*

Dear —,

I was awfully pleased to get yours of September 20th last night, right up at the Front, and tried hard to read it all by moonlight.

I got your last letter, and thought I had answered it, but can't be sure, as I am growing as little intelligent as a barn-door owl, never having anything to read, and no topic of conversation except wars, past and present.

I am quite safe and sound—touch wood. I'm sure when I do get home, except for sunburn, no one will believe I've been through anything at all, as I seem to thrive and grow fat on it.

Want of time is certainly not a reason for not writing with me; the main reason, and quite a sufficient one, is

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that at present I have no paper, but I've torn a leaf out of my diary for you, and hope you will be able to read it.

I am at this present moment sitting, in company with four or five men and a sergeant-major of the decetka—about ten to twelve men, and I don't know the English equivalent, unless it's squad—to which I belong, in a small sandy-stony hollow to which we betake ourselves in the daytime, at dawn, and out of which we cannot move till dark, at the very front of the Front. The rest of my platoon are dotted about behind various large rocks, and all the rest of the company, and the Bulgars, are ensconced behind other rocks and hollows at distances varying from 100 to 500 yards. The nights are bright moonlight, and we go to a place a little further up and keep up a brisk fusillade on both sides, just to show we're awake, then we come back here at dawn and sleep all day except for a few sentries and snipers, and the artillery has a go.

I did not shoot much last night as we are to advance this afternoon, and I am keeping my ammunition, as I can't get any more till I meet one of our mitrailleuses, my carabine using their ammunition and not the same as the rifles. It's shorter and lighter to carry than a rifle, and shoots just as well and very straight, and easy enough to get plenty of ammunition for.

Being of rather a restless disposition I find it the hardest thing in the world to sit all day in one spot, with nothing to do, but yesterday, not having slept for two nights, I put in the whole day at it, and time did not hang heavily.

I spent the night last night with my vodnik (platoon



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officer) behind his pile of rocks. He's a nice lad, who has lived all his life on the Albanian frontier, where they sleep and eat with their rifle in their hand, so there is not much he is afraid of. (*N.B.*—Wounded in our advance later). Coming back across the open I nearly got picked off by a sniper, but I lay down behind a handy rock till he had done congratulating himself that I was dead.

I wish I could have seen the Western Front and compared the two; I think I should like this the better; our casualties are slight compared with yours I imagine, and we get more sport. The only thing I don't like is the going, you can't call it marching, over these mountains. It's the most devilish country, bare hills covered with big rocks, loose rolling stones, and no water. The Serbs are used to that sort of thing, and think nothing of going miles over these hills at a good stiff pace. It's broiling hot, and without shade in the daytime. They are all awfully good to me, and treat me like a kind of mascot. I don't carry anything except a cartridge belt (sixty-five rounds), carabine, revolver, water-bottle, and big square of light canvas tenting which we use as a groundsheet, or to wrap ourselves up in; four pieces make a bivouac tent for four men, when we are anywhere where we can put tents up.

We all wear those iron helmets; I hate mine when it is very hot, but love it when we get shelled, which happens pretty often, with very slight cover, and stones and shrapnel come pattering down on it; I only wish on those occasions it was big enough to crawl right under like a snail's shell.

We were by way of "resting" in reserve a few

## APPRENTICESHIP IN WAR

days ago (we've changed over with another company now), but they shelled us so incessantly day and night that what with the sun and the noise and the shrapnel it was not much of a rest.

I'm glad they didn't have the "sense," as you call it, to keep me out of it. I could have stopped with the Regimental Staff, or the Battalion Staff if I'd liked, but I didn't want to, though when we are Battalion Reserve I spend a good lot of time with them, and mess either with them or the officers of my own company, but when there is anything doing I like to be in my proper place with the men, so get plenty of variety. The more I see of the Serbian soldier the more I admire his good qualities and forget his bad ones. I don't know any other men I could go about with like these.

Our shells are whistling overhead as hard as they can pelt at the Bulgar positions, stirring them up prior to our advance.

I found a poor devil of a badly wounded Bulgar near our dugouts in reserve. He had been lying there two days, left behind by the Bulgars before we came, and just out of reach of a pool of water. No one was doing anything for him. You can hardly wonder at it, as the *least* the Bulgars do to our wounded and prisoners is to cut their throats. Our men simply leave them alone; you can hardly expect them to risk their lives carrying them a long way to the ambulance. I took to this chap because he had such spirit, and wouldn't kowtow to anyone. Though he was badly shot through both thighs and couldn't move, and expecting every moment to be treated as they treat the Serbs, he lay there hurling abuse at everyone, and said if he had a



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rifle he would shoot us yet, and he was just a lad. I dressed his wounds and bandaged him up as well as I could, and gave him some water and a drink of brandy, which he refused at first under the impression that it was *poison*! The poor chap was quite grateful, asked if I was a Captain (I suppose because I had been cussing the men and making them get me bandages, etc.), and said I was a "silna brat" (fine brother). I got into a fearful row from Colonel Pesitch, our commandant of battalion, who said he couldn't even get his own men off to the ambulance, and that we had no business down there anyway, where they were shelling; but his bark is always much worse than his bite, and after storming at me till he'd reduced me to pulp, he did, after all, in the evening, and as soon as possible, have him carried down. They think quite a lot of my opinion, and would even let me keep a pet Bulgar, I believe, if I wanted to.

I wonder if you will be sent to the Salonica Front. I know a few of the English officers with the Salonica Force, some of them were in Durrazzo and Corfu. They looked upon me with more than suspicion at first, thought I was a kind of camp-follower, I believe, and I didn't go out of my way to enlighten them, but the Serbs are great people for gossip, and know everything about everybody, and they—the British—are more than decent to me now.

I hope you won't be bored by this awful long epistle, but it has whiled away the time for me. If friends at home only knew what it is to get letters out here, they would write more often.

There's a perfect inferno going on, our guns shelling the Bulgars, and they us; mitrailleuses rattling to

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beat the band, and rifles cracking. It's "everyone to his place" now, so must stop.

*P.S.*—(Three days later). Our advance came off, not quite as we expected; the less said about it the better. We got ourselves into a very hot little spot.

*P.S.*—(A week later). I've changed my mind about "sport", and loathe war and everything to do with it with all my heart, but if I wrote particulars the Censor would not pass it "

The second letter was written a month later, to another friend, and it also got posted in my pocket, though I used to make an effort to get off a letter to my own family whenever it was possible.

*November 10th, 1916,*

In a funk hole.

Dear —,

I have often been meaning to write to you, and just now "time" is the one—and only—thing I have plenty of. I am sitting in a hole about 7 feet by 4 feet, and 3 feet deep, with two officers of my company. We can't stir out of it from dawn till dark, and even after dark it is not healthy, as there are always stray bullets, which though not aimed at you, may prove just as annoying. We had a man killed last night by one of these chance shots, while eating his supper, and another wounded. If anyone at home begins asking me to describe the War I shall tell them to go into their back garden, dig a hole and sit there for anything from three days and nights to a month, in November, without a



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thing to read or do, and they can judge for themselves—minus the chance of being killed, of course.

Before this, however, we had a very hot time for a month straight off, and very heavy losses, fifty per cent., then three days in reserve, where we got shelled, then three nights being marched up and down these mountains. War is anything but sport and glory. However, we are still keeping our ends up, and are further ahead than anybody. My regiment possesses the reputation—rather a doubtful blessing—of being the best and toughest. The "Gvosdjeni Puk", Iron Regiment, we are nicknamed, and we are more often at the front than any other, at least, so we think. Wherever there is anything particularly hot we are marched off to take a hand in it. Everyone is awfully good to me, and the men will do anything for me. I'm always in the front line with them, and they are terribly worried that I may get killed; and so is the Colonel, but so far I haven't had a scratch, though the men beside me have caught it.

The actual fighting is the least hard part of war, as you have plenty to do, and there is some excitement in it, but there is no sport at all in climbing a mountain all night in pouring rain, or sitting behind a rock till you have cramp. Sitting still under shell-fire is the most trying, and there is not a man alive who is not afraid of that, when there is no cover at all, or very little.

I wish we had a few British troops mixed with us; the Serbs have such a tremendous admiration and affection for the British soldier, which is more than they have for some of the others.

Of course this is quite a different type of fighting to

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the Western Front; it's mountainous, and we don't stop in one place long enough to dig deep trenches, but go ahead at any cost. Last time we were relieved we had been actually fighting every day and every night for just a month. A regiment of another of the Allies relieved us, and proceeded to dig big dugouts, and proper communication trenches; we were close by in reserve for three days and hardly a shot was fired. While we were content to have cold grub brought to us once a day after dark, and nothing else, they had their hot coffee brought them in the morning along communication lines, and settled down as if they meant to live there.

The other two men are asleep. It's pouring with rain and very cold; we can't put up a tent, but have rigged up a bit of one to cover our hole, and it is not as wet as it might be.

Please give my kindest regards to Mr. ——. If he thinks I ought to be a nurse instead of a soldier tell him we have Red Cross men for first aid, but when the men near me get wounded they generally get me to do them up, in between shots.

Please excuse paper, I've had to tear a leaf out of my diary, having no other. It's tea-time, but no tea being forthcoming I've just replaced it with bread and dry coffee, ground small and mixed with equal parts of soft sugar. You eat it with a spoon, or spread it on bread, and it is not half bad, and very sustaining, but I'd give a good deal for a piece of English cake.

*P.S.*—I hear my name has been sent up for promotion to sergeant-major.

## CHAPTER III

### MOUNTAIN WARFARE

Difference between this and the Western Front—  
Terrible losses—Fighting round the Black River—  
Watching another battalion attack—What a Panic feels  
like—The Zouaves take over from us and we go out  
for a spell—A real card-party.

Ours was an entirely different sort of warfare to that on the Western Front. Anything more unlike the engagements one sees in pictures, and on the cinema, it would be hard to imagine.

There was no "going over the top", there being no trenches; getting *to* the top of one mountain after another, where the Bulgars were snugly ensconced, was always our objective.

As I have said, I could only see what was happening in my own immediate neighbourhood, and I am only trying to put down the impression made upon me by what I saw with my own eyes, and not an account of the campaign as a whole; but I presume that what I saw was a fair sample of what the whole Army—some 120,000 men, more or less, and to start with—were doing. I believe that at the end of that 1916 offensive, when we had taken Monastir with the French, and consolidated our line, there were about 18,000 left, but



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I cannot vouch for exact figures. The "Cerna Reka" or "Black River" above and round about which we fought, might well have been re-christened, for at times it must have run red. Next year all those who had recovered from their wounds came back, and we were, besides, greatly reinforced by fresh Yugoslav regiments, the men of which had left their new homes in America, and elsewhere, and come to help their Mother Country.

We were well practised in the art of taking cover. Both the Serb and the Bulgar fight in much the same manner, except that the Bulgars seem to revel in bad weather. The wetter and stormier the night the more fear of a Bulgar attack. They seemed to love a thunder-storm, whereas the Serb hates the rain like a cat, and his natural inclination is to cover his head with his overcoat and sit tight till it passes. Therefore, on a pitch black night with pouring rain we always had to keep a specially sharp lookout.

In an attack we would creep from rock to rock, often for hours and hours, until the final moment, and then charge—"Hurrish" as it is called—with a blood-curdling "hourra hourras"; a yell once heard never to be forgotten.

Once I was enabled, from a point of vantage on a hill, to watch an attack like this by part of another battalion, and, not being an active participator on this occasion, was able to follow with interest what was happening. Steadily and relentlessly, like a slowly incoming tide, the Serbs advanced. The whole hillside was covered with men lying motionless each behind his own particular rock. At a signal each decetina (group of about ten men under a leader) rose, scattered, raced

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a few yards higher up, and dropped down again, their old places being taken by the decetinas next behind them, who in turn were replaced by the next. Up they crept, bit by bit, until the first one had reached the last scrap of shelter between them and the forbidding rampart of big rocks behind which the Bulgars were vainly trying to stem the advancing waves. Then time after time I watched men dash singly across the last few yards, hurl two or three bombs over and dash back to cover, or drop in their tracks. Once started they needed no one to tell them what to do, they were in their element at this game, and each man used his own initiative; in fact, the difficulty very often was to keep them back.

Often we would lie for a whole day like this, flat on our faces, either in scorching sun with our backbones melting from the heat, or in pouring rain—it always seemed to be one or the other—whilst awaiting the signal to advance.

One day Miladin and I were lying together side by side behind a little rock about as big as a portmanteau, within a few yards of the Bulgars, whilst the rest of our vod were scattered behind near-by rocks. The Bulgars were behind a sort of natural fortification immediately above us, which we had taken once, and had been driven out of the same morning, at dawn, by a counter-attack. We were sick at heart, and burning to retake it. We lay there till late in the afternoon, motionless, peering round the edge of rocks and firing a few shots as the fancy took us to keep the enemy from making a sortie and bombing us. From force of habit we talked in whispers as if we were stalking game, though the



100 DOGBOYS OF BATTN. H.Q. BEHIND THE LINES  
 101 THE 100th BATTN. IN BATTN. SERGEANT SANDER IN CENTRE



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Bulgars must have been acutely aware of our proximity.

We were hungry, having had nothing at all since supper the previous night, and so wet and cold that the only thing I could think of to keep up my spirits, and while away the time, was to repeat the "Charge of the Light Brigade," which, as a child, I thought the most wonderful poem in the world. Over and over at intervals I repeated it to myself, though excepting for the fact of being "in the mouth of hell" there wasn't much in the poem that would fit our case.

It was pouring steadily, and the mud in which we were lying was rapidly turning into a very squishy bog. But we could not go to sleep, the simplest way of forgetting one's troubles, because the signal to advance might come at any moment. The pangs of hunger increased, and so did the cold.

Desperately I turned out all my pockets to find something to play with, and to my great joy came upon a forgotten half-packet of rather damp and squashed cigarettes. I divvied up with Miladin, and, encouraged by my success, he turned out a miscellaneous assortment of odds and ends from his knapsack, to finally come upon a very stale and rather mouldy chunk of bread-crust; so we felt we were in luck.

Not a sign of life from the Bulgars, and the waiting was beginning to get monotonous, when, suddenly, Jovan, lying behind a rock just on my left, created a diversion for us by putting out his head to see what was doing, and instantly got a bullet through his tin hat, which nearly put an end to his career. With blood spurting from the top of his head like a hose pipe he rolled himself over to us.

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"Put pressure on the spot," came the echo of my old St. John's Ambulance lectures, and I clapped the palm of my hand on the cut artery, and pressed hard to keep him from bleeding to death till Miladin had dug the little packets of first-aid dressing, which every man carries, out of his own and my pockets. Kneeling up to bandage him better brought an instant fusillade from the enemy, and the warning shouts of "lie down, lie down," from the men round, showed me the advisability of dropping flat again.

With some difficulty, in that position, I managed to put on a secure, though not very scientific, head-bandage. The incident also reminded me that I once said to one of my old ambulance company, when I was at home, that I should like to hold a bandaging class where all the pupils must lie flat on their faces while they applied decorative-looking bandages.

Jovan managed to roll himself further down the hill, till he was eventually picked up by the stretcher-bearers. He lived to fight again, though was never again quite the same husky fellow he used to be, but he is one of many from whom I still get letters, as he always declared that I saved his life.

After various vicissitudes, lasting two or three days, the Bulgars were eventually shelled out of it, and we quietly walked into our old position, strewn with gruesome mementos of several attacks and counter-attacks. That the Bulgars were often officered by Germans was shown by the body of more than one of them. One of our men took some very good field-glasses from the body of one of these. I gave him a couple of packets of cigarettes for them, and have them now.

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The Serbs will never take any actual clothing from a dead man, as they think it unlucky. I picked up a Bulgarian cap one day and took the badge off it, but they gave me no peace till I threw it away, as they declared I should get killed, though needless to say I had not taken it off a corpse.

We had no proper reserve, every man was needed at the Front, but each company in turn would be battalion reserve, and each battalion regimental reserve for a few days; which meant that we should be just behind the front line, but liable to be shelled at any moment, the Bulgars making a pretty good guess of the whereabouts of Headquarters.

Then, if there were any dugouts we could sleep in them, but always in our clothes and boots, and ready, any moment of the day or night, to be sent up at a handgallop as reinforcements, which was worse, I always thought, than being on the spot and so knowing what was happening.

On these occasions one was not supposed to move away from one's own vod, but Major Pesitch, the commandant of the battalion used very often to invite me over for meals at his mess, and I used to spend a good deal of my time there, first asking my vodnik as a matter of form. We used to play cards a great deal, the only amusement we had, and I learnt all the Serbian games. We were great gamblers, as there was no other way of spending money, apart from the fact that it didn't seem worth while to carry it about in one's pocket, when liable to be killed at any moment.

Often, when in "Reserve," we used to sit up all



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night like this, generally in the dugout of the commandant battalion.

One afternoon I remember sitting down at two o'clock and playing "Raub," a Serbian card game, steadily and without a break until eight o'clock the following morning, a batman bringing in our meals.

Sometimes now, when playing family bridge for threepence a hundred in an English drawing-room, the memory of those wild, jolly nights comes over me, and I am lost in another world. So far away it all seems now that I wonder whether it was really myself, or only something I dreamed. Instead of the powdered nose of my partner I seem to be looking at the grizzled head and unshaven chin of the Commandant, and the scented drawing-room suddenly fades away into the stone walls of a tiny hut lighted by a couple of candles stuck into bottles, and thick with tobacco smoke, where five or six officers and I sit crowded on bunks or campstools. For evening dress, mudstained, blood-stained khaki breeches and tunic, and for vanity-bag a revolver. The camp table was covered by the thick brown folds of an army blanket, and before each was a pile of Serbian bank notes and gold, and a tumblerful of red wine. Then came a batman with another relay of little cups of the thick, sweet Turkish coffee, which he brought about every hour. But here comes a trim maid with tea, and I return to the prosaic drawing-room with a start, and the realization that I am a "lady" now, not a "soldier and a man"; also that Serbian soil is resting lightly on the graves of many of those happy comrades I have been seeing in my dreams.

If we were anywhere near the Colonel, he always sent

## MOUNTAIN WARFARE

an orderly over to invite me. It is always the custom, directly a guest appears, for your batman to make Turkish coffee for everyone; you may be working with a man all day, but if you go to his tent or dugout it is like making a formal call at his own home. First you are offered a spoonful of jam and a glass of water, or, failing jam, a lump of sugar, and then coffee and cigarettes are handed round. I used to wonder how many times a day the Colonel's batman made coffee. He used to be greatly scandalised when the Colonel told him to hand me the coffee first; a mere Sergeant, and a woman at that. Nothing would ever induce him to do it of his own accord, no matter how often he was told. The Colonel used always to laugh and ask him why he didn't, whereupon he would shake his head and say he couldn't possibly, it wasn't right. Nothing could have exceeded the Colonel's kindness to me, and after any big engagement he would send an orderly right up to the line to find out if I was still all right; generally with a present of two or three packets of cigarettes, a bottle of wine, or a tin of sardines; the latter a much prized luxury. The men loved him, and the whole regiment mourned his loss when he was killed. This occurred when the offensive was all over, and by one of the last shells, which came through the tent in which he was sitting. His men said there would never be another Colonel like him.

All the best seemed to have been killed in that offensive, and the losses among "Commandirs" of companies was appalling. The Third Company of our battalion was very unlucky; it had three commandirs killed within three days. Captain Goyavitch was the

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first ; he had a little boy in England—one of the many taken there after the retreat—and, when talking to him a couple of days before he was killed, I promised him, when I went home that I would try and find his child. I am glad to say that I was able to keep my promise, and the boy used to spend all his holidays at my sister's house.

Our company had changed hands, and our old commandir, Lieutenant Jovitch, who had taken such care of us all through Albania, and to whom the men were devoted, was with the battalion staff, but was sent to the unlucky Third Company and was killed the next day. The men would do anything to protect an officer whom they liked, so blamed the Third Company bitterly, declaring it had not taken proper care of him, and that if only he had been with us he would not have been killed ; though his conspicuous height and fearlessness made him a hard man to take care of in any case. He had fought through the Turkish and Bulgarian Wars ; had every kind of medal for bravery, and had, in two years, risen from private to commandir ; almost a record in that Army.

At first the officers used to wear their epaulettes, which of course made them a mark for the enemy, but afterwards an order was issued that they were not to do so when in the line. One major woke in the morning to find his epaulettes had disappeared. Greatly puzzled he asked his batman about it, and the man confessed that he had taken them off while he slept. The major was furious, asked what he meant by it, and told the man to give them back to him ; but the man only replied doggedly that he would do it again, and



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was going to take care of him whether he liked it or not. "We all know who you are, and will salute you just the same without epaulettes, and it's not necessary for the Bulgars to know you." The popularity of an officer had nothing at all to do with strictness or leniency, for often the greatest martinet would be liked, even if feared. The men were ruthless judges of character.

One night Vukoje, our vodnik, was wounded, and he was a great loss; for the men would follow him anywhere, and as long as he was in sight would hold on anywhere.

That same night we had done one of our sudden sprints, Vukoje leading as usual, and all the rest of us at his heels, trying to keep up. At the end of it I found myself lying, with half a dozen of my decetka, at the furthest outpost, an unpleasant little spot without any cover, and bullets whistling all round. We were quite by ourselves and unable to see three yards in front. We were expecting the vodnik's cheering visit every moment, but as the minutes passed and he never appeared the men began to get restive, for we thought we were further out than we were meant to be. At last we heard an ordonnance's voice in the dark calling out to know where I was.

"I'm here," I shouted.

"The vodnik's wounded and wants you."

I thought as much, and was thankful to hear that he was only wounded, as I had begun to fear he, too, had been killed.

Scrambling to my feet, and slinging my carabine over my shoulder, I ran back with the ordonnance and

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found Vukoje with a nasty wound in his right arm, a bullet having gone through it while he was holding it up to fire a Verrey-light pistol, to tell our artillery of our whereabouts. We used to send up a red light if we wanted the artillery to help us; a green to say we had arrived at our destination and were in contact with the enemy, and a white simply to show where we were, or supposing we wanted to light up the Bulgar's movements.

The man who was examining his arm turned it over to me to finish, and Vukoje carried on for the rest of the night, though his arm was useless. He went off to the ambulance at dawn, when an order came for us all, with the exception of an outpost—"muertva straga," or "death sentinel" as it's called—to withdraw to a little gulley, where we lay all day.

When it got dark we went forward again with the sergeant-major who had taken over our vod, and spent the rest of the night letting off a few volleys in the direction of the Bulgars, just to keep them in their place. Once we got the wind up, for we thought they were preparing to attack. We were only a handful, so we tried a bluff which seemed to work. There being some spare rifles about, Miladin, Bogoljub, Mitar, another man and myself each took another besides our own, and resting both rifles on the rock in front of us, fired rapid volleys with both hands. They must have begun to think we were quite a respectable force, for the supposed attack fizzled out, and we laughed heartily at the success of our ruse.

Sometimes I would be so tired after some long climb that when the critical moment came to run across the

## MOUNTAIN WARFARE

last stretch of open ground, fling ourselves down and open fire, I simply could *not* run. Walk I could and did, but was much too footsore to run even if there had been a mad bull at my heels; so, through no merit of my own, gained a quite fictitious reputation for bravery and coolness.

At one little place, I remember, finding I could not keep up with them—for it was quite a short sprint, and they dashed across at top speed, then flung themselves on their faces—I put up a bluff by walking leisurely across with my nose in the air, and trying to look utterly indifferent to the bullets whizzing round my head. The little sprint was only a try-on, and, when we returned after lying there for half an hour, I overheard another squad behind some rocks asking who I was, and admiring comments about my coolness. But I thought to myself if they did but know it, and had I not been so tired and footsore, I should have run for cover as fast as any of them. There was nothing much one could do for one's feet, though when I got a chance I would borrow a little oil from one of the mitrailleuses and smear it on thickly.

There was no opportunity of doing anything much in the washing line, but passing one day a tempting well with a bucket I succumbed to the temptation to stop and at least wash my face, then catch up with the others. Lifting my dripping head after a satisfying souse I encountered the amused gaze of Major Pesitch as he strolled past with Lieutenant Janatchko, who was acting then as his Adjutant.

"What, in Heaven's name, are you doing here all by yourself, Sandes?" he demanded.



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"I'm just catching up my company," I said.

"Indeed, well you look more as if you were dressing for a party, so you'd better come along and have lunch with us, and put off catching them up a little longer."

I gladly accepted his invitation, as I had been up since dawn, and we had had no breakfast. So I had a very good lunch with him, Janatchko, and a young artillery captain, that is to say when we were able to find a spot where we could settle down in comparative peace; but it took us some time to find one as the Bulgars were shelling the whole area more or less vaguely and promiscuously.

Major Pesitch was the sort of old soldier who, were he lost in the desert, would manage to improvise a meal, and some kind of a shelter out of most unpromising materials; Janatchko was another.

I remember an incident in Albania, when Janatchko was Commandir of the Company, and we were camped in pitch darkness, in a queer place; apparently in a grove of holly trees. Janatchko lit the fire himself, saying the ordonnance were too slow; and he and I had eaten our supper, and were asleep at opposite sides of a roaring fire while other people were still hunting for their wood. Major Pesitch seemed to know the name and family history of pretty well every man in the regiment, and had a laugh and a joke for everyone, even under the most trying circumstances.

We were pretty well inured to bombardments, but Vukoje and I got into the worst one we had ever been in on the following morning, near a village called Krushegrad, and our own carelessness nearly cost us our lives. Our vod had taken up its position on an apparently, per-

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fectly peaceful, little hillside, and the rest of the company was sitting in a hollow a little way farther back. The men were leisurely digging little holes for themselves, and Vukoje and I were sunning ourselves on the grass watching them, when, suddenly, without any warning, a wide circle all round the spot upon which we were sitting was swept with shells. They came so thick and fast it seemed as though a dozen batteries were firing together.

Fortunately for us, the shells were not the huge ones. We were absolutely in the open, and couldn't move to look for any shelter. Vukoje could just lift his head every now and then to shout to the men to lie still. The shells were not falling among them, and they all kept their places with the exception of two or three who made a dash for the hollow. Had we moved they would all have given way.

Cuddled close together, with our heads buried in our arms, it seemed to me as though we lay there for an hour, but I suppose it was really about ten minutes. The rest of the company, who were watching from the shelter of the hollow, told us afterwards that all round where we were sitting was nothing but one dense cloud of smoke, and they had not thought it possible that anyone could be left alive within it.

I remember thinking at the time that, anyhow, there would be no nasty mess for either of us to pick up; one shell would certainly have made an end of us both. People who have never experienced it, often ask one's sensations under shellfire, and what one thinks about, but, as far as I have ever been able to gather, no one thinks about anything, or has any "sensations" at all,

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excepting that of blue funk. There may exist men who have never felt fear, but I have never met them.

The men really believed I was lucky, and bore a sort of charmed life. They were very superstitious, and if they thought anyone brought bad luck they did not like to be too near them. This belief was still further strengthened by an incident which happened one day when our company abandoned a position, but which we subsequently re-took.

We had taken this strong position on the previous day, and were now in the cold, grey, uninspiring hour of dawn, lying on our faces, awaiting the inevitable counter-attack from the Bulgars. I may mention here that there was no tot of rum, or anything else, served out to brace us up after the long, cold night. Another company lay to our left, and the Bulgars attacked them first. This attack was made in such force that the company broke, and came back, its captain with it, helter-skelter straight through us. We were lying there waiting, nerves already strained almost to breaking point, with the Bulgarians close on that company's heels, yelling their savage "hourra hourra."

Everyone knows that in a sudden panic men follow each other like a flock of sheep. Vukoje's sustaining presence was not with us, he having been wounded a few days before, and where the other vodnik was I have no idea. Anyway, before Rangel, our best sergeant major, one of the real, old school, could raise his voice to steady us he was killed on the spot. The man lying beside me collapsed with a grunt, shot through the heart, several were wounded, and in a moment everyone had scrambled to his feet and was following the Third



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Company to the shelter of a little ravine some three or four hundred yards behind us.

I had never seen anything like this happen before, and being very much of an amateur, and still labouring under the wholly erroneous delusion that a brave man never runs away under any circumstances, I followed, hardly able to believe my eyes. But I had only gone a few yards when I heard the voice of the captain of the Third Company shouting to the men to come back, and I turned to go back to him, still thinking that the hasty retirement was only momentary, and that they would all return in a minute.

But an Angel with a Flaming Sword cannot stop a company that has once lost its head. For all practical purposes this one might just as well have been deaf, dumb, blind and idiotic. So I, my little batman Dragoutin—at my elbow as usual, and exclaiming vigorously that we should both be taken prisoner—and another man turned back with me.

By the time we reached Captain —, standing behind a rock and hastily scribbling a message for his runner, standing beside him, to take to the colonel, the Bulgars, who had checked for a minute, were coming on again, and had almost reached us. Nothing was to be gained, therefore, by standing on the “ burning deck ” any longer, and we also all ran for our lives to the ravine, with the Bulgarian bullets humming round our heads. It was then that the incident occurred which made the men think my name could not be written on any bullet.

I must explain that, as there was a shortage of uniforms, most of us wore the blue uniforms with which the French had fitted us out ; but a few of us, myself

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among the number, still wore the khaki I had wangled from the British for my own regiment when it was in Corfu. The Bulgars were all in khaki, and Sergeant Milosh, who had only come back the day before from hospital, and did not know me by sight, thought, when he saw me legging it down towards the ravine some little way behind the captain, that I was a particularly daring Bulgar who was trying to take an officer prisoner, and consequently tried to bring me down.

He was lying, with two or three others, half-way down the slope to the left, and not 200 yards away. The first shot missed me, and there were so many singing round that I did not notice it particularly. As he rather fancied himself as the crack shot of the company he concluded something must have gone wrong with his rifle. Possibly he had not tested it properly since he came back: so, grabbing the rifle of the man next to him, he fired two more with the same result. Before he could reload I was safely in the ravine.

To test his own rifle he then selected a small white stone exactly where I had been when he fired the first shot, and hit it at the first shot. Utterly puzzled he went down to the ravine later on, and asked some of the others what had become of that Bulgar, when, to his dismay, he heard who it was he had been shooting at.

It was not till long after that he told me there was something weighing on his mind he wanted to tell me about, but had hitherto been too ashamed to confess to. He always used to say afterwards that God must have taken care of me, for otherwise he could not possibly have missed a man at 200 yards when he could hit a stone the size of a belt buckle.

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The Colonel told me afterwards, with much chaffing, that the message he received from Captain B—— was that he had “only Sandes and two *other* men of the 4th Company, and six of his own with him.”

After this incident the men rallied at once, and we started immediately on the difficult task of retaking that position, and that was the day I have already described when I lay repeating to myself the “Charge of the Light Brigade,” and any other stirring poems I could think of.

Miladin tried to explain the psychology of the thing to me. He said that they were fully prepared for the counter-attack, and if anyone had told him five minutes before that he was going to lose his head like that he would have laughed at him.

Once we did get that rock we were heartily sick of the place, for we could not move more than a couple of yards in any direction, by day, and, worst of all, there was not a scrap of wood near it to make a fire for hot tea. We had a good view though, over the surrounding country, but nothing else to do but lie and watch the Bulgarian and our own positions being shelled by day, and stand by for an attack all night.

We were not sorry, therefore, on the night of October 28th after eight days there, to be relieved by the 3rd Company, 3rd Battalion. They told us also that a French Regiment was coming up to relieve us, and that the whole 2nd Regiment was going out for a spell.

When relieved it was a pelting pitch-dark night, and we wended our way back through that same little ravine; which was now a rushing, miniature river, to the other side where Major Pesitch was ensconced, rather



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like a very wide-awake rabbit, or rather bear—for there was nothing of the rabbit about our commandant—in a small hole in the rock, which he shared with the mitrailleuse captain.

The place was only a very little way back, and there were no dugouts; no tents might be put up, and there was no shelter at all for the soaked men; they just crouched behind big rocks, and wrapping themselves in their "shatorski creela," or square of tenting, slept as best they could. But at least it was "reserve."

I walked round with D——, a young second lieutenant who was acting O.C., and we saw, or rather heard, for it was too dark to see a yard, that each platoon was settled behind a separate big rock, and when all was done, and by the help of the rain, plus the stream we had forded, we were as wet as though we had lain down in and rolled in it.

Here we began to think about finding some hole or cranny for ourselves. Michailo, the battalion ordonnance, who had come to meet us and guide us in, said he knew of a hole in the rock which had previously been occupied by the commandant until they had found a better one for him, and into which two people could squeeze. There was no hay on it, but at least it would be out of the pelting rain.

Big, good-natured Michailo knew me well, from being a frequent guest at the battalion H.Q. "Give me your carabine," he said, "you must be dead beat." Slinging it over his shoulder he led us to the little cave. The Bulgarian lines on our right were not far off and within rifle shot, hence the blundering round in the dark. The first detachment of the French 2nd Zouaves also had

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already arrived in our immediate vicinity ; but of this we were unaware.

Michailo struck a match, and bent down to illumine the mouth of the cave. As we peered inside, the little flickering spurt of flame showed the crouching figure of a man, and, knowing well that there were none of our own there, Michailo flung my carabine to his shoulder with a cry of " Bulgar." The man called out something in French, but I was the only one who understood. " Stop!" I shouted, " it's a Frenchman," but too late, for Michailo had fired twice, the first shot nearly taking off the tip of my ear, and the second point blank into the hole, wounding the poor Zouave mortally, but unfortunately not killing him outright.

Here was a nice business. The French had come to help us, and the first thing we had done was to shoot one of them. Someone would have to answer for it, the poor lieutenant probably, though it was the natural conclusion to jump at that it was a Bulgar spy, or a patrol waiting for us with a bomb, seeing that we didn't know there were any French within a mile of us.

What was to be done now ? Michailo said there was a French Captain sleeping with the commandant of battalion that night. Looking round for the other ordonnance who had been with Michailo we found he had promptly fled, evidently not wishing to be mixed up in the affair. So we dispatched Michailo post-haste to borrow a bit of candle from the knapsack of the nearest soldier, and to send another to the battalion Staff to inform the French officer there, while we waited at the mouth of the cave. It was of course impossible to do anything at all for the wounded man without a light.

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Michailo was back in a few minutes with a bit of candle, which we stuck in the mouth of the cave, and, I suppose, on the principle of "ladies first," they both politely stood back for me to go inside.

Not much liking the job, for I had a kind of idea the Frenchman must think *we* were Bulgars, and would probably strangle me with what strength he had left, I crawled headfirst through the narrow opening into the hole where he rolled about groaning. He was quite conscious, and when I spoke to him in French, and tried to reassure him by telling him we were friends, and it was all a mistake, he said he knew it was a mistake, but that he was dying all the same.

At first I could not find out where he had been wounded. He seemed to have so many clothes on, and I could find no blood. I had therefore to call Michailo in to help me, and when we had got some of his things off—no easy matter in a hole not four foot high—I saw a bullet wound in the abdomen. There was internal haemorrhage, and he was done for.

We had stuck the candle in the mouth of the hole, and no sooner had we done so than the Bulgars started firing at the light, but we had to let them keep on at it, as I could do nothing in the dark. When I had bandaged the Zouave as well as I could, though it was not of the slightest use, excepting to show the French Ambulance that we had done our best, he lay holding my hand tightly.

I had always thought it was only in books that soldiers expressed themselves in beautiful and patriotic sentiments when they lay dying, but this Zouave, shot like a rat in a trap, and writhing in agony, never uttered



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a reproach, He said he knew it was all a mistake, "mais," he added, "tout de même je meurs," then, with a ring of triumph, "je meurs pour la belle France." It seemed to me an interminable time to wait, and I would have given everything I possessed to have had a morphia syringe in my pocket, and to have been able to put him out of his agony at once.

The French captain, who had been wakened, and came at once in answer to our peremptory summons, must have been hardened to unexpected sights, but even he seemed a little surprised at the strange scene which met his eyes. Two Serbian soldiers and a lieutenant sorrowfully standing, regardless alike of Bulgarian bullets and pelting rain, round the mouth of a small cave in the heart of the Macedonian Mountains, while inside, lighted up by a bit of candle stuck on the point of a bayonet, a dying Zouave lay tightly holding the hand of a Serbian soldier who spoke French with the voice and accent of an Englishwoman.

The Zouave was still able to speak to him, and told him his name and company. He also confessed that he had been sentry by the side of the path, but had left his post and crawled in there out of the wet.

Mercifully he relapsed into unconsciousness very soon, and, while we were standing outside waiting for the end, I told the captain what had happened. He was awfully decent about it, saying that it was nobody's fault, but the unfortunate Zouave's for having left his post. He also said he had been quite sure all along that something of the kind was bound to happen that night in the pitchy darkness, with two regiments, neither of whom understood a word of the other's language, and

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that when he got our summons he thought it was one of his men who had shot one of ours.

Feeling that that hole was the last place on earth I wanted to spend the rest of the night in, I left it to D—, as he didn't seem to have any horror of it, and accompanied the captain back to battalion Headquarters. He seemed to know who I was, and said he was sleeping between Major Pesitch and the mitrailleuse captain in a hole where there was just room for three to squeeze in like sardines, and would give me his place, as I was soaked and tired, and, anyhow, he had to be off at dawn. However, nothing was further from my wishes than to risk having the major wake up by chance, and demand an explanation there and then, which I was feeling too upset to give. So I declined his offer with many thanks, and Michailo gave me his own little cubby-hole on some hay, himself turning in somewhere else.

I wondered how the commandant would take it, and the best way of shielding Lieutenant D—, but I was immensely relieved in the morning to find the French captain must have already told him. As soon as I presented myself he told his batman to make some coffee, and demanded cheerfully why I had been shooting Zouaves the night before.

"I didn't shoot him," I said.

"Well, it was your carabine anyhow. Whose fault was it? Was it yours?"

"No, Gospodine Majore," (Mr. Major, the form of address).

"Was it Lieutenant D—'s?"

"No, not his fault at all."

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" Was it Michailo's? "

Michailo, standing by with my coffee cup in his hand, waited a little anxiously for my answer.

" No, he thought it was a Bulgar waiting for us with a bomb, and, of course, he shot him "

" Well, whose fault *was* it then? "

" No one's at all, except the poor chap himself for being there."

" Well, he's already paid for his mistake, so there's no more to be said."

The men were more sorry about the untimely death of this French soldier, who had come to fight for Serbia, than if it had been of one of their own comrades, and much impressed when I told them how he said he was "dying for France." " Who of us would ever have thought of that? " one said. " More likely we'd have been swearing," added another.



## CHAPTER IV

### WOUNDED

A hard night's march—The Colonel tries to bluff me—Hill 1212—Wounded—Difficulties of transporting the wounded in the mountains—Four days' travel to Salonique—The 41st General Hospital.

By now it was beginning to get really cold, this first week in November.

The whole battalion had been having eight days' rest as Regimental Reserve, when, at nine o'clock one night, we got our marching orders. We were to go to another reserve, it was rumoured, on the top of a mountain, where we were to stay for ten days out of the reach of shell fire—a hitherto unknown luxury.

As far as camping on the top of a mountain was concerned the rumour proved perfectly correct, but not as regards the ten days.

We had a heart-breaking climb all night. The path got steeper and steeper, and as there had been heavy rain it soon developed into a regular quagmire, on which one slipped back one step for two taken.

Up and up we struggled, with eyes glued to the back of the man in front, and following in his footsteps. Thankful I was that I had no heavy pack on my shoulders like the men.

Every hour, when the whistle blew for a ten minutes'

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halt, we lay down on the ground to regain our breath and have a smoke.

I could hear the man behind me gasping and struggling, and turning round when the whistle blew, I found him to be a fellow we called the "Shuster" (shoemaker), a T.B. subject who always had hard work to keep up on a march. He was leaning up against a rock with a face livid from pain and fatigue.

"How goes it, Shuster?" I said. "You've done well to get so far."

"I never should have," he replied, "but you were just in front of me, and I made up my mind that as long as you kept on I would, too."

I thought he was going to collapse entirely, and wished it were possible to follow the advice an English officer had given me to *always* keep a small flask of brandy in my pocket for emergencies. Excellent counsel doubtless, but impossible to follow, when there was no way of replenishing the flask, and an "emergency" for someone or other cropped up every day.

Men often fell out for a time on a march like this, but a rest and the cold night air soon revived them, and they would straggle in later. The long, hot, waterless marches in summer were much worse.

Dawn was breaking when at last we reached the top, and, with a few uncomplimentary remarks about those who made plans for our welfare, we rolled ourselves in our overcoats and slept the sleep of the dead.

All that day, everyone was very busy fixing tents and settling down for the ten days' rest. It was really a lovely spot, covered with big trees, and with a magnificent view all round.

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I had asked for, and obtained, leave from the colonel to ride next day to Ostrovo, where there was an English Hospital, and also a camp. I thought, therefore, that it would be a good opportunity to go and see some of my own kind, hear the news, and get some English papers.

It was some distance, but the colonel said he would give me a horse, and that I could stay two or three days.

In the meantime I took a ramble round to explore the place, while my batman was putting up my tent on a more permanent basis than usual. I got back to camp rather tired, to hear, to my disgust, that we were to start for the Front at three a.m. So that was the end of our "ten days' rest."

It was still pitch dark as we slithered and fell head-long through the thick undergrowth, down the other side of that accursed mountain, on our way to no one knew where.

By about midday we were all beginning to feel as if we could do with a little sustenance, and on our next long halt I spotted an ambulance flying over a tent in a little hollow below us.

"How would a little condensed milk be, to spread on our dry bread?" I suggested to my decetina. This was the favourite way of consuming the thick, sticky kind, but it was a rare and priceless luxury, quinine and castor oil being the only things to be had for the asking at an ambulance.

One of the men dared me to go down and try, and bet me a packet of cigarettes I would not succeed in wangling a tin of milk out of the doctor. I succeeded



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beyond my wildest hopes, for, not only did he invite me to a very good lunch, but sent me back in triumph after it, bearing no less than *five* tins, which I divided among my decetina. I expect the kind-hearted doctor knew better than I did whither we were bound, and thought he might as well gratify what would probably be a last request.

While we were munching our sticky lunch, the colonel and his staff dismounted near by, and the colonel sent over an ordonnance to invite me to come and have coffee

"I thought you wanted to go to Ostrovo, Sandes," he said to me. "Why didn't you go?"

"But we are going to the Front," I said.

"Oh, we're only going to hold some lines of communication near another Reserve; we'll not be near any fighting. You have plenty of time to stay away for several days, and I'll give you a horse to start now, if you like."

Colonel Militch had always talked German to me from the time I first joined up—when I knew no Serbian—and he had forgotten that, by this time, I had picked up a considerable amount, for, turning to one of his Staff, he said with a smile, and in Serbian, "You know we are going right into the thick of it, and it's such a pity for her to get killed. I'd like to keep her out of it."

They all had to laugh when I answered him in my best Serbian, thanking him for his thoughtfulness, but saying I would rather stay with my company.

Once before, when feeling upset at the loss of so many of his best officers, he had told me that the Regiment had been twice entirely wiped out—the first

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time in the Turkish War, where they received their nickname—and that this was going to be the third time. “For,” he said, “we are fighting to the last man—the last man.”

When we said “au revoir” it was the last time I ever saw him, for two or three weeks afterwards, when lying in hospital wounded, I heard that the last man to be killed on that offensive, and by a stray shell through his tent, when the regiment had already gone into reserve, was our gallant, jolly, little colonel.

All the entries I have in my diary for the next few days seem to be careful notes of who were on our right and left flank, interspersed with uncomplimentary remarks about the weather; for snow was beginning to fall pretty heavily up in the mountains where we were. We must have been close to the Bulgars though, for my last entry is that I sat in a very wet hole on the top of a mountain, which I shared with two vodniks, and played cards all day; also that we could not move out of it till dark. There my diary abruptly breaks off for several months.

Although I can remember every detail of the night of the 15th November, and the succeeding days, my mind is a complete blank as to events during the preceding seven days. I can, therefore, only pick up the thread again on the evening of the 15th, when, what was left of the regiment—about 500 effectives—was sent up as a reinforcement to help take Hill 1212, the last position before Bitolj, which was to be taken at all costs.

Bitolj, our great goal, must have been a somewhat disturbed little town to live in. It was the last strong-

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hold of the Turks, who had overrun Serbia for five hundred years, until finally driven out by the Serbs in 1912. It was again taken from the latter by the Bulgars in 1915, and now, from Hill 1212, we were looking down upon it, and preparing to take it again.

Hill 1212 is a fairly high mountain, and the Bulgars were strongly entrenched on the top of it.

About 10 p.m. my company was halted behind a big pile of rocks, some way up, and close to the battalion commandant. We now found we were Battalion Reserve, with the rest of the battalion on the other side, facing the enemy, who preserved a dead silence all night.

It was bitterly cold, so we spread our groundsheets on the snow, and slept wrapped up in our overcoats. No Serbian carries a blanket, they scornfully contended that a man wasn't a soldier if he couldn't sleep out on the mountains in midwinter with only his overcoat!

Dawn was just breaking when I was awakened by the sudden crackle of rifle-fire, followed clearly, loudly and ominously close, by the wild "hourra, hourras" of the Bulgarians' attack.

A moment afterwards a messenger came from the commandant. Every man was on his feet in an instant, and at V——'s shout "Drugi Vod napred" (2nd Vod forward), we made for the outlet of the rocky barrier between us and the enemy, past the commandant, who shouted, "Hurry V——," as we tore past him with fixed bayonets to help our company.

Everything seemed mixed up on the other side. The Bulgars had attacked, driven out the regiment in front of us, and were following them down the mountain side. Higher up everything was shrouded in dense



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mist. For the moment we could not see the enemy, only hear him, and between us was a steep bit of mountain side, covered with snow and dotted over with rocks. Behind these latter groups of men from both regiments were sheltering, sometimes with their officers, who were trying to urge them to go forward up the slope again in the teeth of the Bulgar rifle and machine-gun fire, which swept the whole open space. Everything seemed to be happening at once, and, as far as I could see, it looked a "go as you please" sort of affair, so long as you went forward and not back.

The last glimpse I had of V——, our own vodnik, was his attempt at persuasion of a mixed group of men from another company, partly by example and partly by the sight of the uncompromising looking revolver in his right hand, to dislodge themselves from the rock behind which they had taken shelter.

Lieutenant D—— was a few yards higher up, and I joined him with the rest of my lot. I was then decetar of the 1st Decetina.

The regimental bugler had apparently got an attack of cold feet, and was incapable of blowing either "charge" or "retire," for the captain of our 3rd Company had snatched the bugle from him and was blowing with all his might. I could see him, standing up on a rock, clearly silhouetted against the snow, a mark for every bullet, producing a queer medley of sounds. The art of blowing a military bugle is not learnt at a moment's notice. Everyone, however, knew what it was meant for.

"Forward, forward," urged Lieutenant D——, our other vodnik, lying alongside me in our little group.

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A moment's hesitation, a "now or never" sort of feeling, and we scrambled to our feet and raced forward, and I forgot everything else except the immediate business in hand. As we flung ourselves on our faces again a group of Bulgars emerged out of the mist, not ten paces above us, and, dodging behind the rocks, welcomed us with a volley of bombs. They were almost on top of us, and it was actually our close quarters that saved us, for they threw the bombs over and behind us instead of into our faces.

I immediately had a feeling as though a house had fallen bodily on the top of me with a crash. Everything went dark, but I was not unconscious for I acutely realized that our platoon was falling back. I heard afterwards that every single one of them had been wounded by that shower of bombs. One had his face split from nose to chin, another an arm broken, but none, except myself, had actually been knocked out.

I could see nothing, and it was exactly as though I had gone suddenly blind; but I felt the tail of an overcoat sweep across my face. Instinctively I clutched it with my left hand, and must have held on for two or three yards before I fainted. Lieutenant D——, its wearer, told me afterwards that he felt every button tear off, zip, zip, one after the other, but had not the least idea what he was dragging behind him.

The men only fell back to the nearest rock, to face round again, and it was then that Lieutenant D—— saw me lying stretched on the snow between them and the enemy. Under the very noses of the Bulgars he crawled back over the snow towards me, and I came to again to hear him telling me to stretch out my arm.

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Finding I could not even do that, but still doggedly determined to get my corpse, as he thought it was, he crawled still nearer, got hold of my wrist, and shuffled backwards again like an agile crab, dragging me with him. He happened to be towing me by my right arm, which was smashed, and I can remember wishing I could tell him to pull by the other. Behind a rock a sergeant-major and another man were waiting, and directly Lieutenant D—— shuffled within reach they bundled me neck-and-crop into a bit of tenting, and half dragged, half carried me over the rocks and snow a little further back. Both the S.M. and D—— happened to be very small men, so could not carry me well, and there was no time to wait for a stretcher, so I bumped along like a rabbit flung into a poacher's bag.

When they got a little way back they halted, found I was still very much alive, and debated what to do with me. We had been joined by three or four more, and they glanced anxiously round, for, at any moment, we might all be taken prisoners.

Much more than their lives they were risking for me, for no one knew better than they their fate if the Bulgars got them, and had our men fallen farther back they would have been on us in a few moments. Though my rescuers evidently thought I was done for, and even when I said it was no use all getting taken on my account, they stoutly swore they were not going unless they could take me with them.

Next day ten of our men were found with their throats cut, lying in a row near the spot where I was wounded. They had been taken prisoners and despatched at once.



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At last the stretcher-bearers arrived saying the Serbs were holding fast, and one of them dressed my wounds there and then. When he took off my revolver-belt he found that it was the revolver that had saved my life. The bomb had hit it, exploding two of the cartridges, and jamming another, but it had broken the full impact. Lieutenant D —promised to have it mended and to keep it safely for me. He also promised to find the carabine I had dropped, and which worried me more than anything else. He declared he knew exactly where it was lying, and would get it when they went forward again to the same spot, as they were going to do as soon as they got me safely off. Sure enough he did so, and presented them both to me when I got back again to the regiment six months later; the revolver repaired, but still showing the marks of the bomb. (He was given the highest decoration for valour, the Kara George Star (Officer's) which means much more when given to a 2nd Lieutenant than to a senior officer.)

The Serbs have a theory that you must not give water to a wounded man because they say it chills him, so they poured fully half a bottle of brandy down my throat instead, and put a cigarette in my mouth.

I soon found that my right arm was badly smashed, and that I had wounds pretty well all over my back and right side, but between the brandy and the cigarettes they had been plying me with I had no thought of dying on the spot, and was quite surprised when, looking up, I caught the little Sergeant, who had helped carry me, watching me with his eyes full of tears. I assured him that it took a lot to kill me, and

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that I should be back again in about ten days. It actually turned out to be a good deal longer than that.

I happened at this tense moment to be wearing a brand new pair of corduroy breeches—my own, and not out of Stores—which I had put on when leaving Reserve, as my old ones were in rags. The ambulance man knelt there murmuring sadly at the need for cutting them, but he had to use his clasp-knife ruthlessly, both on them and my sleeve, before he could bandage me up; so that at the first ambulance where I arrived, soaked with snow and blood, the doctor used to quote me as the raggedest, wettest and dirtiest-looking soldier they had ever seen carried in.

I was desperately anxious to know how things were going, but it was not till long afterwards that I heard the full account of it. How the Bulgars had never got further down than that place, and how the battle had raged all the rest of that day and all that night, and how the next morning the Serbs had driven the enemy out of their positions ever so much higher up. What I had thought to be the top was not halfway up!

The French were in command on the whole Front, but they were chivalrous, insisting that the Serbs were to be the first to enter Bitolj. And this they did on the anniversary of the day, four years before, when they had triumphantly taken it from the Turks.

The Serbs have a legendary hero, Kraljevitch Marko, who, with his wonderful white horse, was supposed to be sleeping in a cave in the mountains, to reappear on the day the Turks were finally driven out. In 1912, when attacking Bitolj, they were so impetuous that their officers had tried to hold them back, but they

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would have none of it, declaring they could see Marco on his white horse leading them on.

I was very lucky in being carried off to the ambulance at once, most of the wounded had to wait until dark, and they could not have shown more consideration for me had I been a general.

Owing to the driving snow, which had obliterated all landmarks, the stretcher-bearers missed their way to the First Dressing Station, and, instead of being about half an hour, were nearly two hours hunting for it. I wonder they did not put me down and leave me, for it is no joke carrying a stretcher over those mountains in the snow

The doctor was relieved to see me at last. Long afterwards, when I was well again, he told me he had got into a nice row with the colonel over me. The colonel, it appears, telephoned to know if I was still alive, and when told I had not turned up ordered the doctor to send out a patrol to look for us. Shortly afterwards he telephoned a second and then a third time, till the harassed doctor at last said he had sent out two patrols and could not spare any more men. Whereupon the colonel furiously asked him if he was waiting for him to come and look for me himself, and that he was to send out every man he had till I was found. So I think that what I really deserved was a severe wiggling from Headquarters instead of a medal.

The First Aid Dressing Station was the same in which I had been a dresser when I first joined the regiment, and, by the time we reached it, blood was dripping through the stretcher. I was about at the end of my tether, but they gave me hot drinks, warmed



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me up, and then laid me on the table to probe round and find some of the numerous pieces of bomb. I buried my nose in the broad chest of Doctor B——, who was standing at my head, while the other one worked, and frankly yowled for the first time. But he knew better than to sympathize with an overwrought patient, so he lit a cigarette, thrust it between my lips, and told me to "shut up and remember I was a soldier," which had far more effect than any amount of petting would have done.

From there I went on by stretcher to the next dressing station, the Divisional Ambulance, where I stayed the night, but still on the stretcher. On arrival at every ambulance, according to Serbian custom, they wrung me warmly by the hand, and congratulated me on being wounded; for in those days it was considered an honour to be wounded in the defence of your country. Always the first words the mothers used to say when they came to hospital to visit their boys were, "Chestitam sin." "I congratulate you, my son."

The commandant of the Division, Colonel M——, who had always been very kind to me, came down himself to the ambulance tent to see me, and asked me, if I got well again, whether I would ever come back to them again. I told him that of course I was going to get well and come back, and he said, "Bravo"; also that if I would come back he would never let me go to the Front again, but that I should be placed with the Divisional Staff. I thanked him very much, but privately hoped I would be able later to make him change his mind, as, though certainly more comfortable, I thought it would be frightfully dull, and that I should

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lose all caste with the men if I chose a soft billet instead of roughing it with them.

Next day my stretcher was slung underneath a sort of two-wheeled handcart, which three soldiers pushed and pulled, as the next dressing station was too far away to carry anyone. I don't know how long we took, but it seemed to me the greater part of the day, the men occasionally unslinging the stretcher and carrying it on their shoulders where the path got too bad and jolted too much.

Often we passed strings of mules carrying wounded, some riding and clinging to the pommel of the saddle, others sitting in a drooping heap tied into a sort of pannier, one on each side. Always they called out to know who I was, and then "would I live," to which my bearers cheerily replied that it looked as if I would. A man had to be tough indeed to survive that four days' journey to the base hospitals in Salonique. Two days either on stretcher or muleback over rough mountain tracks, the best part of a day by motor-ambulance over indescribable roads, and then a whole day in a railway cattle-truck from the railhead at Vodena.

The ambulance was alongside the headquarters of Mrs. Harley's Women's Transport Unit, the first to work in Serbia, and they volunteered to take me in for the night. All the drivers excepting one were girls, and they were doing splendid work, transporting the wounded from the last Serbian Ambulance to Vodena in their motor ambulances, most of which were owned by their drivers. Mrs. Harley, Field Marshal Lord French's sister, gave her life for Serbia shortly after. For after the Allies took Bitolj the Bulgars bombarded the town

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continuously. Mrs. Harley and her daughter gallantly went to help the women and children, and, while working there, the former was killed by a splinter of shell which came through her window.

They were an extraordinarily cheery, "turn-their-hand-to-anything," sort of crew, and, although chauffeurs and not nurses, they seemed to me to be as good at nursing as they were at driving. Next morning, when they despatched me in one of their motor ambulances, they lifted me from one stretcher to another without a jar, having learnt, among their other accomplishments, proper scientific lifting, which I am sure all their patients appreciated as much as I did.

Carefully and slowly as they drove that was the worst part of the trip, for the roads were in a shocking state, and I was not sorry when we reached Vodena at last, and the Serbian Relief Fund took me in to their Field Hospital. They had only just arrived, and were not really open yet for patients, but all the same they very kindly kept me for three days till I could be sent down to Salonique with one of their orderlies, a man named Nicholas.

Nicholas was a big, powerful fellow, and a born nurse. I could not move myself at all, but he could lift me about as though I were a baby. He never seemed to want to go to sleep, and would sit day and night beside me, rolling endless cigarettes for me and himself, and telling me stories about his other patients, and about the war.

The ambulance train, composed of cattle trucks, left at eight in the morning, and in these we jolted our weary, day-long way to Salonique, arriving about nine p.m.

In my cattle-truck were two slung stretchers, and



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I was put into one of them, the consequence being that I did not suffer from the jolting as much as the others must have done. At one end were tiers of wooden bunks filled with lying-down cases, and the less severely wounded sat or lay on the floor. Serbian trains are jolty at the best of times. They stop at a station as if they were indulging in a head-on collision, and cattle trucks are not sprung like first-class carriages!

Two French doctors were in charge of the train, but as nothing was provided for us in the way of food or water, and we were left to our own devices, the wounded men who could walk used to climb out at each of our numerous halts and forage for themselves; and, very frequently, if they found themselves near friends, did not come back at all. At one of these halts the French doctor came in almost tearing his hair, and calling down the wrath of Heaven on the whole Serbian Army.

"It's the same thing every trip," he explained to me. "I start for Salonique with a certain number of wounded to be delivered, and before we get there half of them are lost. Can't the Serbs *ever* stay where they are put?"

His difficulties were of course considerably increased by the men not understanding a word he said to them, and taking full advantage of the fact. A lying-down case was brought in which he wanted to put on one of the bunks where a lightly wounded man had already ensconced himself, and who refused to come down. In vain he harangued him. The soldier, knowing perfectly well what was required, remained unmoved, apparently thinking he was not bound to obey a French officer. The Frenchman threw up his hands in despair.

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"They are the most undisciplined, disobedient soldiers in the world," he complained.

"Indeed, they are not," I replied indignantly, and to prove it lifted my head and hurled one brief sentence at the man, who climbed out of the bunk at once, and sat down on the floor.

I was to go to the 41st General Hospital, about twelve kilometres out of the town, and as there had been some misunderstanding about an ambulance, it was after midnight before I finally got there, and in an ambulance driven by a British soldier.

The 41st was a British Military Field Hospital for Serbian soldiers, and they at first demurred about taking me in, saying that the hospital for sick sisters was at the other end of the town. But the British Tommy, who was much concerned about me, told them I was not a sick sister, but a wounded Sergeant, and wound up by roundly declaring I was not fit to be driven another yard, also he was not going to do it.

One reason I think for their reluctance was that they already had one wounded woman sergeant on their hands, Milunka, a Serbian girl from my own regiment, and, as she had proved more than enough for them all, they feared I would be such another. The Second Matron, with whom I afterwards became great friends, told me her first exclamation when she heard they had taken me in was, "Good God, another of them!"

I was carried into a big marquee used for the sick sisters when there were any, but the only other occupant was Milunka; so, without further preamble, I was dumped into bed, given an aspirin, and told to go to sleep!

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"Give me a cigarette, Nicholas," I said.

"You are not allowed to smoke in here," said the Sister.

"Well, she can't walk outside to do it," replied Nicholas for me, calmly lighting one.

"The Matron will take them away from you tomorrow," the Sister assured me comfortingly, as Nicholas tucked the rest of the packet under my pillow.

Nicholas, being under the impression that I was his patient, and that he was going to look after me as he had been doing for the last two or three days, was perfectly furious when firmly told by the Sister that his services were not required here, and that he must clear off to the men's quarters. He went back to Vodena next day in a huff, perfectly convinced that no Sister could look after me as he could.

I passed a sleepless night, racked with pain, and when the Second Matron came in next morning I took the bull by the horns.

"Matron," I said, "I've got a packet of cigarettes under my pillow, and Sister says you are going to take them away from me."

The Matron, an Irishwoman like myself, looked at me with a friendly grin.

"Smoke as much as you like," she said, "so long as you don't set the tent on fire," and I began to feel as if I might perhaps survive being "nursed" after all.



## CHAPTER V

### CONVALESCENCE

In Hospital—Milunka—Convalescing in Bizerta —  
I get into hot water for "dressing up" as a woman—  
Farewell to Bizerta—Going back to the Front—  
Starovenski Redoubt—We are in trenches for the first  
time—A night bombing raid.

When the Surgeon came in and began his examination he said nobody had had any idea, when brought in the night before, that I was so badly wounded, as I looked so extraordinarily sunburnt and fit, and had made no complaint. He thought, too, that, thanks to the open-air life I had been leading, I would soon heal up.

Twice a day he would dress me himself. He was always jolly and considerate; would never start till he saw that I had a cigarette going to deaden the pain, and a whisky and soda to buck me up. Milunka used to take a deep interest in the proceedings, and, one day, had the curiosity to count my wounds. The count completed, she informed me I had twenty-four, and I felt that it was high praise when she said I could bear pain as well as a Serb. She herself was a perfect stoic.

Every fine day my bed was carried outside, for, after having lived so long in the open, I felt smothered in a tent, and there were generally half a dozen or so Serbian soldiers, with their arms in slings, or with heads bandaged

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to be seen sitting round my bed. Some were from my own regiment, and, at first, they used to sneak in to sit with me, only to be chivvied away by the Sisters, as it was against rules to come near the Sisters' quarters. But when Colonel B——, the Chief, heard of it, though he was generally a terrible stickler for "regulations," he said I might have them whenever I liked, as it was lonely for me by myself. Looking upon me as they did as quite one of themselves, they were always urging how much better off I should be with them than in a big tent all by myself. One sergeant-major with a damaged arm used to spend most of the day with me, and suggested that as there was an empty bed in their tent, between him and another man, they would look after me at night when I could not sleep, and they were quite indignant when I said that in any case I would not be allowed to go there.

Some of the Sisters were rather annoyed that I was allowed to have these soldier-visitors, and were in consequence rather sarcastic about my supposed wish to be moved into the men's tent.

All these men were terribly homesick. The whole of Serbia was at that time overrun by the Bulgarians and Austrians, the consequence being that they had no idea as to the fate of any of their families, and they used to turn away with bitter longing on their faces when the post was dealt out. They also told me the British orderlies often shared their parcels with them, and told them all their own home news. As usual, the British Tommy made friends wherever he went, and seemed in some extraordinary way to be exempt from the difficulties experienced by ordinary

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people when confronted with a strange language.

Colonel B—— was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes a convalescent was allowed out of hospital, but he had to be back sharp by six p.m. One Serb confided to the others that he was going to spend two days in Salonique, because, as he said, the British could do nothing much to him. Flogging was not allowed in the British Army, and reprimands or "zatvori" (cells) would pass lightly over his head, and were not worth troubling about. However, when he got back after his jaunt he found to his surprise that the colonel held different views, and that the British Army had a punishment quite as efficacious, and infinitely more humiliating to the feelings of a Serb, than flogging. Though there was no brutality attached to it the French and English, who used to accuse Serbian officers of cruelty to their men, would probably have been surprised had they heard this man declaring that he would rather be flogged every day for a week than have it again, as it had hurt his feelings so much.

The only person whom not even the colonel could subdue was Milunka. She was, and always had been, a law unto herself.

She was a peasant girl, and was about seventeen when she joined the army; also with the reputation of already having shot a man in her own village for insulting her sister. Extraordinarily brave, she was in hospital now with a bullet in her thigh, wounded for the fifth time. She had volunteered to cross an open space swept by fire to fetch ammunition which was badly needed. She actually succeeded in doing it, and, staggering back with her heavy load, dropped it at the feet of her O.C.,



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then rolled over. Unfortunately, however, she was always in hot water over something or another, and, being a peasant like themselves, the men did not treat her at all in the same way they treated me. Being in another battalion also I did not often come across her.

Long before she was fit to walk properly she got out of bed, and hobbling out of the hospital on crutches went down town without leave. When she reappeared next day, having been absent for twenty-four hours, the colonel put her by herself in a small tent, as a punishment. She solved the problem by immediately setting fire to the tent. As soon as her leg was strong enough she repeated the performance, and stayed away three days. On her return the exasperated colonel put her under arrest in a small tent, with a sentry at the door; but she completely flabbergasted the sentry by walking out under his nose. "What could I do?" said the Tommy, ruefully, "she just laughed at me when I tried to stop her, and I couldn't shoot a woman in cold blood."

The colonel fumed. He could boss a whole British regiment or a hospital with ease, but he could not manage a chit of a Serbian girl! Finally, the Second Matron, who liked Milunka, persuaded him to turn the culprit over to her, and ask no further questions about her. Sergeant Milunka then settled down, more or less quietly, in the tent with me; but it was as much as anyone's life was worth to mention her name to the colonel.

The real joke was when she ran away for the third time, got the Serb military authorities to give her her papers to return to the Front, and then came back to

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hospital to say good-bye to the colonel, and thank him for all his kindness! She was perfectly unconscious of the fact that she had upset him at all, and really wanted to express her gratitude for all the care she had received. But the Second Matron, not having the temerity to take her up to the colonel's quarters, told her that he was not very well, and that she would give him the message when he got better.

When I had been about a week in hospital, King (then Prince Regent) Alexander sent in his own aide-de-camp, and the aide made quite a little ceremony of it. In the presence of the colonel, doctor, matrons, and as many others as could be collected round the bed at short notice, he made a speech, and, to my surprise and delight, pinned on my pyjama-coat the Kara George Star for non-commissioned officers and men—the most coveted decoration in the army, carrying with it promotion to sergeant-major.

There was no room for petty meanness or jealousy in Milunka's lawless make-up. Although no one had made any particular fuss about her, though wounded for the fifth time, she was frankly delighted, and used to tell everyone marvellous yarns of my doings at the front—mostly pure invention.

Shortly after she got back to it, the regiment had a visit from Prince Alexander, who called her up and asked her which of us was the more courageous, she or I, to which she promptly answered, "Sandes." The King's reply was to present her with the same order and rank.

Later on she went from Bizerta to France, where she had a great time, and came back with the Legion



FIELD GUN JUST CAPTURED FROM THE  
AUSTRIANS (1918)



GERMAN TROOPS MARCHING IN OPEN  
ORDER.



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d'honneur and the Croix de Guerre. She is now married and settled down near her native village. She also has a son who should, when the time comes, make a good soldier.

On the first day I was allowed out of bed, and urged on by Sergeant-Major Yefto, who said it was now high time that I was getting about, I limped over, on his arm, to pay a visit to his ward, on the other side of the hospital. I, however, got into sad disgrace with my Sister for walking so far, but next day Colonel B—— had a special, little two-wheeled cart made, and in this the men would run me all over the place, dressed in hospital "blues" with red tie complete, for I had no clothes of any kind with me.

On Christmas Day there was a big evening dinner for all the doctors and Sisters, to which the colonel also invited me. On the same afternoon the Second Matron came laughing into my tent, to say that he wanted to ask me something, but did not like to do so himself.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Well, you know the Colonel's a little bit old-fashioned, and he thinks, as there will be several strange doctors, it would be better were you to dress as a woman for the party to-night, if you don't mind."

I had got a Serbian private's uniform out of stores by this time, and I thought, as most of the doctors coming had already paid calls on me, either in bed in pyjamas, or sitting up in hospital "blues," they would probably have survived the shock. But, as the colonel had been so good to me, I would cheerfully have arrayed myself as a nun, or a Salvation Army lassie, could it have given him any pleasure. So, between them,

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two of the Sisters rigged me up in complete nurse's uniform, with a white cap to cover my close-cropped head, and I was carried in, settled at the long decorated table, and enjoyed the evening hugely.

For Serbian Christmas, thirteen days later, I was allowed to drive down to Salonique in uniform and stay the night at a hotel with friends. But when I got back I had to go to bed again with a relapse and fever, and the doctor said he wouldn't let me out again till I was discharged for good—or they would never get rid of me.

I have mentioned in a previous chapter a Bulgarian whose wounds I had dressed at the front. By an extraordinary coincidence he was lying in this very same hospital, but it was only after he had recovered, and had been sent to the prisoner's camp, that I heard of it. I was very sorry when some of the men told me, when too late, that he had begged and begged of them to carry him in to see me. They seemed, however, to think his request too much of a good thing.

About the middle of January, 1917, I was discharged as cured, temporarily at any rate; though, as I had "half a blacksmith's shop" still in me, as the doctor expressed it, he warned me I was likely to have further trouble off-and-on.

Most of the Serbs were sent to Bizerta, in Tunis, to convalesce, but, owing to some delay in the sailing of the French hospital ship, I had to wait in Salonique for two days.

The doctor's warning came true sooner even than he had thought, for after two days' celebrating convalescence in Salonique, where I had hosts of friends, I limped

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on board the hospital-ship and was promptly sent to bed again by the French doctor. So once more, to my disgust, I became a stretcher-case.

I have a lively recollection of that little operation on board ship, for I came to in the middle of it. I could feel the pain, but had not the least idea where I was. I dreamed I was at the front and being tortured, and was evidently expressing my sentiments in good forcible Serbian, for, at the same time, I could hear the French Sister expressing wonder at what I was talking about. Fortunately she could not understand a word.

We disembarked at Sidi Abdullah, and they carried me in to the French Naval Hospital, the military hospital for the Serbs being only in wooden barracks. There they dug out some more pieces of bomb, and put me to bed for another three weeks, with French sailors to nurse me, by way of a change.

Bizerta, not a bad little town, but terribly hot in spring and summer, was packed with Serbian convalescents, and there was a big military camp at Nador, outside the town, to which I was often invited. We used to drive to it along a lovely coastroad in "yips" as we christened the little two-wheeled conveyances, because the driver used to shout "yip, yip" to his horse throughout the drive.

Three and a half months I lay in Bizerta. I had not expected to be nearly so long, but my leg crocked up again in March, and I had to go into a French hospital.

Fortunately I had crowds of friends in Bizerta, French and Serbs, so was never lonely, and on the whole had a very jolly time, especially as I was allowed to



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live in the town, and, instead of at the convalescent camp, in a flat belonging to a Serbian officer and his wife.

Unfortunately there was a good deal of jealousy between the French and Serbian officers. "Cherchez la femme" as usual. For the Serbs, besides being a novelty, were mostly big, good-looking fellows, and very free with their money.

My own, chief difficulty was that I could never be quite sure when I was supposed to behave as a "lady" and a guest, and when as a plain sergeant, for sometimes I was treated as one, and sometimes as the other.

On one occasion the French Admiral invited me to a luncheon-party at his house, and afterwards said to a Serbian staff-captain, who had been present, that I did not comport myself as a sergeant should in the presence of his superior officers. The captain, however, took up the cudgels on my behalf, and told him that he himself had created the situation, and I was not to blame for it. The captain also reminded him that, when he had first entered the room I had stood up, and had been absolutely correct until he asked me to sit down, put me in the place of honour at his right hand at table, and treated me as a lady guest. I took good care to remain very much the sergeant next time I met the Admiral.

The Serbian Military Commandant of the town was another who sometimes treated me in one way and sometimes in another, the consequence being that I never quite knew what to do. He was also a terrible martinet, and all the officers were afraid of him.

Here is an example. One night he invited me to dinner at the best hotel, and, after giving me a very good

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one, and treating me as anything but a non-com., he suddenly remarked, in his severest tone, that I had a small spot on my tunic; that my hair wanted cutting, and that he should send his barber round to me next morning.

It was about this time that an Englishman, working here for the Red Cross, and I arranged a small "rag" on the officers up at Camp Nador, where we were both frequent guests. He accordingly telephoned that he was expecting his sister from Tunis next day, and might he bring her up to camp and introduce her. He at once received an enthusiastic invitation to bring her to lunch, ladies being a novelty in camp, where, as a rule, they were not allowed. Of course, I was to be the sister, and a French lady, a mutual friend of ours, spent all the morning rigging me out in her clothes; a very "swish" silk frock, large picture hat with veil, and very high-heeled shoes, to which I was so unaccustomed, that I toddled in them like a Chinese woman.

Mr. A—— and I took a "yip" and started for camp, but when we got to the first sentry we found that the officer who was to meet us there had not yet arrived, and that nothing would induce the sentry to let us pass.

In vain we argued. He was told that I was a sergeant and that he must have seen me pass into camp dozens of times. Nevertheless, he barred the road with his rifle, declaring doggedly that he didn't know whether I was a woman dressed as a man or a man dressed as a woman, and that, anyway, I was in women's clothes and his orders were that no women were allowed in camp.

We were afraid our little joke was going to fall flat,

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for if we sent a message to camp it would give the show away prematurely. But at that moment a French officer rode past, and grasping the situation in a twinkling, he turned to the sentry and calmly announced, "That's my wife, I have just ridden up to bring her in." The bewildered sentry let it go at that.

So only one officer was "in the know," and he was keeping himself well in the background, while all the others, in their best uniforms, were drawn up in a group at the door of the mess-room to receive the distinguished stranger. For a moment no one recognized me, and the Colonel came forward to start a grave introduction. Then there was a howl of laughter, and they bore us into the mess to be regaled with drinks and a gala luncheon, with a military band playing, and Mr. A——'s "sister" in the place of honour.

Later on in the afternoon, several of us drove down to the town in "yips" to finish up the evening in some of the cafés, or the Cercle Militaire where we used to play cards every night, and of which, though not an officer, I was also allowed to be a member. It was additionally amusing because they declared they did not know how to talk to me when dressed like that, and implored me to get back into uniform at once, and be one of them again.

"Go up and call on the commandant in his office, like that, before you change," suggested the colonel, "he would be amused."

Mercifully, I did not do so, for the commandant had no sense of humour at all, as I very well knew.

On the following morning I met him in the town, saluted, and was passing on, but he stopped me.



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"Is what I hear true, Sandes? That you went up to camp Nador yesterday dressed up as a woman?"

"Yes, Gospodine (Mr.) Commandant, we went up to lunch, for a joke," I replied innocently. For I thought he might laugh at it; and, surely, if anyone had a right to dress up as a woman, I had.

"Don't you know that in war time it is most strictly forbidden to dress in civilian clothes, and you might be severely punished? Don't let me ever hear of you doing such a thing again," said the outraged commandant, in his sternest "come-on-the-mat" tone, and I thanked my lucky stars that I had not allowed myself to be persuaded to pay him a friendly call the day before.

It's a hard world where half the people say you should not dress as a man, and the other half want to punish you for dressing as a woman, I reflected.

Being thin and sunburnt I could often pass as a man, but my voice now and then betrayed me.

One night, Captain M—— said he would take me to a sort of café that we had not been to before, and we would have some fun; but I must not open my mouth or I should give myself away directly.

Three girls came and sat down at our table at once, and he ordered champagne. Then explained to them that I had only just arrived, and couldn't speak a word of French, and was, besides, too stupid to talk much at all.

"He doesn't look so stupid, but he's very shy," said one of them, planting herself on my knee with her arm round my neck.

I kept it up for a while, though the captain was

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almost helpless with laughter. But when she kissed me I could not help turning my head away, and that, of course, made her suspicious. Then she tumbled to it and they were all much amused, and plied me with questions about my life in the army.

I passed her in the street next day, when I was with some friends, but not by the flicker of an eyelid did she betray me.

I used to go and see the men in hospital sometimes, and, one day, knowing what the Serb soldier likes, I bought a huge basket of spring onions in the market, and distributed them all round. They were delighted. "Our sergeant knows what we like," they said. "The French ladies come and visit us sometimes and bring us cakes. Cakes!"—scornfully—"food for women and children, not soldiers."

When I left every man was sitting up in bed with a chunk of bread in one hand and a bunch of onions in the other, and the wards must have reeked for many a long day.

The doctors wanted to do a transfusion of blood, and asked, in one of the wards, who would volunteer to give his blood for a comrade. The men had never heard of it before, and were under the firm impression that every drop of blood was to be drained from the man who volunteered, and that he would, of course, die on the spot, though the sick man would get well. But without one exception every single man in that ward volunteered. Eventually an oldish chap insisted that he should be the one, "for," he said, "my little day will soon be over, anyhow, and the young men must keep their lives to fight again."

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I was getting impatient to get back to the Salonique Front again, and had applied several times, as there had already been transports carrying troops back; but the commandant invariably replied that I was not yet fit to go.

One day, a Madame X——, a very influential French lady, who had a big estate near Algiers, came to Bizerta. The presentation of medals to some of the troops was arranged for that day, and there was also a big reception in her honour.

One of the Staff captains told me privately that if she invited me to go and stay with her the commandant wanted me to accept, as everyone was anxious to cultivate her, and he intended to escort me there.

"I'm not going to Algiers, or anywhere else. I'm going to the Front," I protested.

In vain the captain pointed out that I was a fool, and that if I would only have a little more sense, and do what was wanted, I should get on much faster, whereas the only thing I should get in the trenches would be a bullet.

I loved being with the regiment, and was desperately afraid that the long-talked-off offensive would really come off some day, and that I should not be in it. Nor could I bear the men to think I was an "ambusqué," as we called those who didn't go back when they could.

I was invited to the reception, and the commandant presented me himself to Madame X——. Sure enough, after we had been talking for a little while, she invited me to come and stay with her.

"What did Madame X—— say to you?" asked the commandant afterwards.



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"She invited me to stay with her in Algiers."

"Well?"

"I said I was sorry I could not go as I was already overdue to go back."

There was a transport due to leave in two or three days, and, next day, when I applied for the third time for permission to go, the commandant said, shortly, that I could.

Bizerta always gave the transports a great send-off. The men, French and Serbs, going back to the Salonique Front, marched down to the boat with bands playing and colours flying. All the town turned out; a military band played all the afternoon on the quay, and the commandant and Admiral Guépratte, the French admiral, came down to the quay and saw each transport off.

The flags, the band, and the cheering crowds; the friends we were leaving behind on the quay, waving farewell in the brilliant African sunshine, brought a sort of lump into one's throat, for we were outward bound into the darkness for another "Great Adventure."

This exhilarating feeling that we were all "little heroes" rather wore off during a six-days' tossing in a very crowded transport, and we were a trifle subdued by the time we reached Salonique.

Of all tedious processes embarking and disembarking from a troop-ship is the worst I know, and is calculated to subdue even the most cheery. At the crack of dawn we were assembled on deck, and had to stand and wait till eight-thirty, when we were taken off in tugs for Mikra Bay. There I was lucky enough to find an old friend, Colonel Nicholaievitch, a great friend of all the

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British. He had a jolly little place on Mikra Bay, and put me up for four days in one of his beautifully cool, little, reed-thatched huts. It was he, too, who had brought me a present of the French carabine I always used.

It was a long way from Salonique to the Front, and I meandered up as best I could, stopping off with various friends en route for meals, or the night. At Vodena I stayed five days at the Dopunski Commando, a sort of clearing station for the men being drafted up to the Front. Vodena is a lovely little place, all water-falls (voda is Serbian for water), and was the last green spot I saw for many a long day.

They were awfully good to me there, and the Serbian commandant, who was a dear old chap, gave me his spare tent to sleep in. They wanted to keep me longer, assuring me there was no hurry, as there was nothing doing, and still snow in the trenches; though, as a matter of fact, I found, when I got there, it was hot enough to fry eggs, and most of the day was spent in the cool of a dugout. I could hear the guns in the distance, however, and was obsessed with the idea that something was going to happen, and that the war would suddenly end before I could get there.

It was a long trek from Vodena, so I did it on cars "scrounged" from the Motor Transport Companies along the route. These British M.T. Co's. took all the ammunition and supplies to the Front, and they were always jolly and hospitable. Some of the officers' huts were really lovely, proper little houses all built of empty petrol tins, and there was always a welcome wherever one dropped in. The British Tommy certainly shone

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

in Macedonia ; everyone liked him, for he was so good to the Serbian soldiers. He was always giving them lifts along the road, and I don't know what we should have done without him.

When I arrived at Divisional Headquarters at Grunishta I was sorry not to find my old friend, the commandant of Division ; but the new one, Colonel Panto Grouitch, invited me to lunch with him and his staff, all of whom I knew well. He also gave me a horse to ride further on.

At the Voyna Komorra (army horse and mule transport) I had to wait till dark, as the 2nd Regiment was then in the Front line, and one could not get there by daylight. When night fell I rode on with an officer who was going to regimental Headquarters.

It was a glorious moonlight night, the mountains looked wild and lovely, and the air was good up there after the relaxing heat of Bizerta. It seemed almost like coming home again, and I was so glad to meet them all once more. I stayed the night there, at Headquarters, but my own company, then in the trenches, must have heard that I had got back, for our vodnik sent his batman with a present of a packet of candles. Perhaps it may not sound a very romantic present, but there, where you could not get the smallest thing, or carry anything more than a knapsack, they were worth their weight in gold, and he judged, and rightly, that I had probably forgotten those small details.

I found that my old 4th Company did not exist any more, and that I was transferred to the 1st Company, of the same battalion. The night following I went to the trenches.



## CHAPTER VI

### LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

How we spent our days and nights—The ideal  
batman—Wandering in 'No-Man's Land'—A little  
raid—Bulgars' night attack—Grunishta Reserve.

As the remains of the 4th Company were transferred in a body to the 1st, I again met most of the same officers and men, but a new O.C. There were only about sixteen of my company left to be transferred anywhere, as we had been so cut up at Hill 1212, and in all the various scraps leading up to it. We were all together in one vod, the 2nd, with, by special request of the men, our own Vodnik, Lieutenant V——, who had miraculously come through. We had been together ever since the Albanian Retreat; shared everything in common like one family; and always looked upon our own vod as a sort of separate unit, with traditions and memories of its own.

The Moravski Division had relieved a Russian Division which had been there during the winter, and while we had been in reserve after the taking of Monastir. The Russians had built fine, little stone huts dug into the side of the hill, just behind the line. But with the Bolshevik débâcle in Russia, they were withdrawn, and consequently we took their place.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

We used to spend fifteen days in the front line and then fifteen in reserve, as we called it, though really only the 2nd line. My hut on this sector was a palatial edifice, about 6 feet by 6 feet, with a raised-up stone bed at one end, and about as soft as stone usually is—though that soon ceased to trouble me—a stone seat, and a doorway minus a door. I had this hut all to myself, but, being the most commodious, all of us generally had our meals in it—the O.C., four vodniks and myself.

We were now on a very steep hillside, without a scrap of shade, and most of the plagues of Egypt, of which the flies were the worst. The trenches were only a stone's throw back, and we used to go into them at dusk through a communication trench, come out again at dawn, retire to our dugouts, and sleep, leaving only a few men in the trenches during the daytime, with machine guns, Lewis guns, etc. There was never anything much to worry us, excepting artillery, during the daytime. This was our first experience of trenches, and we sat in them for a year and a half.

The part of the line we held was called the Starovenski Redoubt, a salient north of Grunishta. It was a long continuous line of trenches, with the Italians on our left wing, and the French on our right, stretching right along to the British at Lake Doiran. We used to amuse ourselves sometimes trying to calculate how long it would take, and whether it would be possible, to walk right along through the trenches till one reached the British lines. The men suggested that I might pay a call and bring them back some English cigarettes in place of the strong, black French tobacco.

In some parts where less rocky there were proper,

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deep trenches; but in others, where it was impossible to excavate except by blasting, they tailed away into a shallow uneven rut, with a low, stone-and-sandbag breastwork, behind which one could not move at all by daylight, nor were there dugout-shelters against shellfire. The positions of these trenches varied from fifty to five hundred yards from the Bulgar lines. My company's place was usually on the extreme left, in one of these shallow ruts, and opposite a spot called Côté No. 1. This spot was a little mound where some annoying rovatz (trench mortars) were concealed, and we were always talking about the way we were going to capture that Côté some night.

Life became regular and monotonous. Grunishta Reserve was a dusty line of tents and dugouts along the banks of a small dry watercourse, not very far from the Cerna Reka, where the men were sometimes taken to bathe. Though not very far back, this reserve took us fully an hour over the rocky ground in the dark, when relieving or returning from the trenches.

Presumably the Bulgars were doing about the same thing, and sleeping when we did, for every morning about eleven o'clock, when they began to wake up, their artillery would give us a good strafe, to which ours replied with interest, then knock off for dinner and their afternoon nap to start-in with another one at 4 p.m. Sometimes, but not often, they varied these times, but we used to feel very indignant if either side did not play the game, and once or twice, when the Bulgars were so unsportsmanlike as to start an unexpected strafe in the middle of dinner, we decided that their rations must have gone astray that day.



## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

When, at dawn, we came out of the trenches, the ration-bearers came along with a huge caldron of tea, without milk, slung over their shoulders, but, as it was a good long way to the kitchen, it was not very hot by the time it arrived. After tea we would turn into our little stone huts, lie down in clothes and boots, only removing our tunics, sleep for five or six hours, and get up for dinner at midday. It depended upon where we were as to whether I could get a dugout to myself; if not, I shared it with our vodnik, and as it was generally very cold at dawn my batman used to hurry back, contrive a small fire, and present us each with a steaming glass of freshly made tea.

The price of a resourceful batman is above rubies. His one business in life is to look after you, and day and night he sees to it that he is within call. He washes and mends your clothes, puts you to bed and gets you up; is responsible for all your belongings, and looks after your money—when you have any; does his utmost to prevent you from squandering it; packs up; brings your food, and stands behind you while you eat it. In short he does everything except actually spoon-feed you.

During my seven years in the army I had had several batmen, and only once struck a dud, so it was no cause for wonder that when I left it I felt like a dog that had lost his tail. Only the officers had batmen, but I was always given one, and most of the sergeants had them officially.

No one can take a soldier as a batman, he volunteers for the job. Some like it and always are batmen, while others will not have it at any price. One I had for a long time, Mitar. He had never been one before, and

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used to say that for me he would go through fire and water, but that nothing would ever induce him to be one to anyone else. When demobilized he went back to his ruined homestead, and little farm out of which the Bulgars had cleared every living thing. I gave him the money to buy a half share with a neighbour in a good-sized calf to do the ploughing, and collecting his family he started afresh. A couple of years after demobilization, happening to be in the neighbourhood, I rode over to pay him a visit. He had rebuilt the house, and, with the aid of a pig and a few chickens, was beginning to get on his feet, but it was only with difficulty that I was able to restrain him from killing the lot to provide a gala luncheon.

Just over the top of the hill containing our dugouts were the trenches, and nowhere to walk during the daytime excepting a little, narrow, dry watercourse where one could not be spotted by the enemy; but on the slightest provocation he would start a strafe. One could, however, move a few yards, and it was a great improvement upon lying from dawn till dark with one's nose in the mud as we used to do in the previous year.

I had a pocket kodak with me, and the men were always keen on being photographed. They expected the finished article to be produced next day, though it was impossible to develop them there owing to lack of water. All the water we used had to be carried up to us, and a good many photos were spoilt by the heat before I could get them developed.

There was a certain lookout-post where there was always an officer or a sergeant all day with glasses, and I went up there and took a few photos. In one

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place could be seen an old woman, from one of the villages, who used to stroll about the Bulgar trenches quite openly, collecting their washing. Our men tried to frighten her one day by sending a few shots round her, but she took not the least notice of them, so they let her alone.

In the summer, when the nights were short and warm, going into the trenches after sunset, and coming out again when dawn broke about three-thirty, was quite all right; but on cold, winter nights, when it got dark soon after four, and the sun did not rise till after seven, the duty seemed very long.

On bright moonlight nights we could be pretty sure there would be no fear of attack, and sometimes, for a whole night, there would hardly be a shot fired. We used to sit and talk in whispers, and watch the Verey lights go up. We also pitied the poor people sleeping in stuffy houses, who would have to pay to see a firework display such as was sent off nightly for our benefit.

The men knew by heart all about their past wars with the Turks; all about their "haiduks," leaders of irregular bands; all their legends, and I learnt a good deal of the history of their country from them. This history has been handed down among the peasants by songs sung to the "gusla," a native instrument something like a one-stringed banjo, but played with a bow. In the cottages, during winter evenings, the whole establishment will sit round the fire, whilst one of the older men drones out one of these interminable chants to the accompaniment of his gusla, and a good singer is always in great request.

At other times the men would talk about their



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families, and show me the photos of their kids (most of them marry between sixteen and eighteen), or ask me questions about my people, and the life and customs in England, about which they always took a keen interest.

The silence was broken only by the steady pick, pick, pick deepening the trenches, or building up the parapet, though I must confess this came mostly from the Bulgar side. The 2nd Regiment were notoriously bad diggers; besides, it was no manner of use giving a man a small tool and telling him to dig out solid rock.

One day at Grunishta, where I had been invited to lunch, the Commandant of Division told me we were the laziest regiment in the army, for every time the 3rd Regiment took over from us it complained that it found the trenches exactly as it had left them, only worse.

"The 3rd Regiment," I said indignantly. "Well, we may not be very good with a spade, but at least we don't go to sleep and let the Bulgars carry off our machine guns without anyone being any the wiser."

This was à propos of what had happened a few nights before, to the 3rd, which was just on our right. The commandant laughed. A Bulgar patrol had got into their trenches, killed half a dozen men, and carried off a machine gun, a sergeant and a private, as prisoners; and all done in such absolute silence that the men, three or four yards from them, had heard nothing, and noticed no disturbance. It was not until the next morning, when the trenches were emptying, that they found the corpses lying there, and they realized what had happened. No officer doing his rounds had discovered it, and all those responsible were hauled over the coals.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

After that, whenever we heard a heavy burst of rifle-fire on our left, we used to say, "That's the 3rd showing they are awake."

Lovely nights some of them were up there in that sweet mountain air, and worth ten years of ordinary life. A vast panorama stretched before our eyes, veiled in misty moonlight; all the heat and ugliness of the day blotted out, while the friendly little stars twinkled down on us—and the Bulgars—and it didn't seem so very far from Heaven. Not half far enough, sometimes, when the drone of a shell, coming straight for us, or a sudden burst of activity along the whole line, abruptly broke up the séance, and sent every man scurrying to his post.

On one such peaceful night I remember an artillery Sergeant had made his way along to our company to pay a visit to Lieutenant V——, who hailed from the same village, and the three of us were sitting chatting and smoking under a little shelter made of boughs and sandbags. Most of these shelters were only a protection against shell splinters, and none of them deep enough to be of any use against a direct hit from a shell.

It was the fourteenth night, and we were just congratulating ourselves that we should be relieved on the following night, and so have every chance of staying alive for another fifteen days at least, when, suddenly, peace was broken by a tremendous crash on the other side of the parapet, followed immediately by another in exactly the same line, but beyond us, smothering us with dust and nearly choking us with the fumes. "They've got a dead line," exclaimed the artilleryman, "one short, one over; the third will be here."

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Scrambling to our feet we made a dash along the trench, he to the right, and we to the left. The trenches were too narrow for anything but single file, and we had barely got away when the third fell, as he had predicted, exactly where we had been sitting a moment before, demolishing the whole shelter, and blocking the trench with débris. Next time I met him the artilleryman said he did not think we received guests at all nicely, and he would not come again, at any rate on a fourteenth night.

Of course none of the men were supposed to sleep at all at night, but I hardly ever felt sleepy, as I had got into the habit, by now, of getting my sleep at any time that was most convenient, or when I had nothing else to do. If I did begin to get drowsy I would go for a stroll to visit our "obijavnitza" (outposts), or along to the machine-gun away on our left.

In front of us, and beyond the trenches, there were two outposts to every vod; three silent watchers in each, crouching in their hole in "no-man's land," straining their eyes without relaxation into the darkness; ready, at the first sign of movement from the enemy, to twitch the cord attached to a bell improvised from a shell-case hanging inside the trench. These outposts were relieved every two hours.

It brought an eerie sort of feeling when once one had stepped out of the trench into "No-man's land." "Over the parapet, Life-Romance," as some war-poet so well expressed it.

We did not do very much raiding at that time, but one night Lieutenant D——, the vodnik of the 1st Vod—the same who had rescued me on Hill 1212



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when wounded—told me that he and the 3rd Vodnik were going to try some new rifle-bombs which had just been sent up, and asked me if I would like to come too. Of course I would, as I had never been so far beyond our own barbed-wire entanglements.

It was a moonlight night, so we went along cautiously, keeping in shadow as much as we could, and dropping flat on our faces the moment a Verey light went up. Every little bush seemed to have legs, and the dried grasses kept whispering as though trying to tell us that things were creeping through them to pounce on us. I devoutly hoped none of the Bulgars happened to be doing the same thing at the same time, but it seemed more than probable.

At length, having crept as near as we dared, we fixed the rifle at the proper angle, and D—— whispered to be ready when he touched off the bomb. The first was a dud, but the second and third must have fallen right into their trench, for we were rewarded by a tremendous howl, and the next moment a dozen rifles cracked. We lay as still as mice till the hubbub had subsided, and then crawled back, stopping on our way to examine our own barbed wire and see that no one had been cutting it. I was irresistibly put in mind of Bairnsfather's picture of the sentimental girl at the window saying, "that same dear moon is shining down on him now," and the fellow on patrol lying on his face and muttering, "That b—— moon will be the death of me yet."

We were being rationed by the French, and in theory, though not in practice, our rations were the same. We were really not badly fed, on the whole,

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but only got one small mug of wine twice a week, which we drank with our supper. My batman took to producing another mug of wine next day with my dinner (rations could only be brought up after dark, so we had to keep half our supper over for next day's dinner), and in reply to my enquiries simply told me to drink it and not ask questions, as it was all right, and he had *not* pinched it. In the end I found out that it was his own one and only luxury he had saved up for me.

On the 14th July, the French Fête Day, the French gave the whole of the Serbian Army champagne. The Bulgars must have got wind of this, and have considerably overestimated the amount—one bottle of a very light kind among three men, and officers the same—for they chose that night for an attack.

The champagne was brought up to the trenches very late at night, and two of our vodniks, another one from the machine guns and myself, decided we would have a supper party in Lieutenant D——'s funkhole. It was central, and the only one big enough to hold more than one person. It was moreover, a very quiet night, and not a shot had been fired.

We started our party about 11 p.m.; a tin of sardines contributed by the machine gunner, and a large tin of preserved apricots which I had long been treasuring for a suitable occasion, washed down with a half and half mixture of the French champagne, and our ration of red wine—a drink the Serbs call "Turkish blood"—and then sat comfortably smoking and drinking Turkish coffee.

At first it had been rather a problem as to how to make the coffee, without which no feast would be

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

complete. Not the smallest fire might be lighted, but one of our batmen solved it by melting down a candle, soaking it in a bit of rag, presumably torn from his shirt, and boiling a small tin of water over the carefully guarded flame.

All at once, without any of the usual preliminary bombardment, the whole sector was ablaze, and crash after crash, mingled with the rattle of the Bulgar machine-guns and rifles. Lieutenant D—— sprang to the telephone to ring up our artillery, and we all grabbed our rifles, scrambled out of the dugout in double-quick time, and tore along the trench to our proper stations.

I was decetar of the 1st Decetina of our vod, with Sergeant Miladin as my second (in theory), and we arrived simultaneously at the pre-arranged spot. It was impossible to see a yard in front of one, but everyone opened "brzo paljba" (rapid fire) into the darkness, white and coloured lights went up, and soon the artillery came to our help. Milosh, the decetar of the 2nd Decetina, had been away at company Headquarters to find out something, and he ran recklessly all the way back along the top of the trench for greater speed, expecting to find the Bulgars already in possession.

With the din, and the glare from the grass in the ravine which had caught fire from some shells, the rockets, Verey lights, and our powerful searchlight, there was a regular Brock's Benefit lasting about half an hour, and then it calmed down.

The grass blazing all along the hillside made a fine glow, but fortunately the wind blew from us, so that the clouds of smoke did not blow up about us and form a smoke-screen. Upon later investigation we found that



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the Bulgars had opened the barbed wire in three places, and had evidently intended to catch us napping.

This happened in a bad bit of the line, where everyone had to take his turn, and where there was no leaving the trench at dawn and sleeping comparatively comfortably. It was very close to the Bulgar lines, which, at this point, seemed to curve almost at right-angles to us, so that we could be very nearly enfiladed. The trench was nothing but stone, very shallow and narrow, with a parapet not even breast high, and there were no dugouts, but only a few little holes exactly like graves, into which one could just creep and lie down.

From dawn till dusk one could not move except by crawling on all fours along the trench, and even that was not encouraged, as you were liable not only to get shot yourself, but, far more important, to get the whole sector strafed should the Bulgars see the slightest movement.

Some Staff officers came to visit the trench one day during the noon siesta, when everything shimmered in the scorching heat and both sides slept. Whether they considered it *infra dig* to crawl, or whether they wished to encourage the men by their example, I do not know, but they walked boldly along with their heads well above the parapet. Had they but known it they were followed by the reverse of admiring comments. "Wish they'd remember that they are here for five minutes, but we have to *live* here," growled one of the men, "and that by the time the strafe begins they will be away."

It was terribly hot, mid-August, swarms of flies, no water at all to wash in, and very little, and that warm,

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

to drink. Glad enough we were after seven nights and six days of this to be taken into Regimental Reserve, where there were fairly good dugouts, though frequently shelled, and, though no baths, at least enough water to have a wash, which we all looked badly in need of.

On my way back to reserve I paid a visit to the searchlight officer, a funny little man who had fixed himself up in an attractive little spot, and lived in luxury surrounded by a miscellaneous collection of pets. I used always to rag him about his soft snap as lighthouse-keeper, but on this occasion he said I could not do so any more, as, according to him, it was entirely owing to the way he had worked his searchlight a couple of nights before that I was there at all.

The first couple of days in reserve, wherever it might be, was always a joyous time. Sometimes we were in tents, sometimes in dugouts. Everyone washed, put on clean clothes, and then went round to pay calls on whoever was near us; entertain, be entertained, to the best of our abilities, and play cards morning, noon night. Officially, gambling was prohibited, but of course everyone did it, as we had no books, and no other amusement of any sort. Space was a bit restricted, and one could not move away from one's own company without special leave.

When in the Grunishta Reserve the Headquarters of the Division meant only half an hour's ride, and I had a standing invitation to go there, but I never went unless an orderly was sent over for me with a special message, as it necessitated going right to the colonel for permission to leave camp. Even my O.C. could not give it, and I knew, although the permission would



SERGEANT MITCHELL IN GRENADINE TRENCH.



"CHICKEN" - OLD SOLDIERS' EXPERTISE:  
EXPERIMENTING AT GREENHILL, MARCH  
1918.



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be given, that the colonel had a strong objection to those who could not stay "put," nor did I like to take advantage of the fact that extra privileges were often extended me.

Each company in reserve had to take its turn at road-making somewhere, for three or four nights, but as this was nothing but hard digging I was told I need not go.

The new colonel was very much liked by the men. He was very particular about their comfort and rations, and used to pay unofficial visits to the kitchens at unexpected hours. He would take a walk every evening after dark, and often must have come across curious things not intended for his eyes, but the result was that his men were happy and well looked after.

One night, when my company was away digging, I was invited to supper by the captain of the company next us. About midnight, we were all—the captain, three other officers and myself—sitting in a little arbour made from branches of trees brought from a distance by his men, and woven on to a rough framework. We were also playing cards by the light of a couple of candles, and money lay on the table. We were all engrossed in the game when, suddenly, the captain looked up, and was petrified to see his colonel standing just outside the circle of light, solemnly watching us. Before we could pull ourselves together, and get on our feet to salute, he had vanished without a word into the night. He was a good sport, though, for the captain heard nothing more of it, though the "Pomuchnik" (Colonel's Second in Command) told him afterwards that they had both been standing there for at least

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN SOLDIER

five minutes, and that if the officers *must* gamble he wished they would have the sense to station a sentry !

About this time, as the result of a letter I had written to a friend in London, parcels addressed personally to some of the soldiers began to arrive. I had put the scheme before the colonel, who took it up warmly, and had a list made out of a certain number of men from each company in my battalion. He chose those who had come from the most devastated villages in Serbia, and were most in need of a little cheering-up.

There was the greatest excitement and delight when these parcels began to come, containing all sorts of little treasures dear to the heart of a soldier, and generally accompanied by a card from the sender. I was promptly inundated with requests from the recipients to address postcards of thanks for them too. Very funny some of these postcards were, and I used to wonder whether people at home ever made head or tail of them ; if indeed they ever reached them, for the post was precarious to say the least of it.

The colonel himself wrote me an official letter of thanks, which I now keep among my own treasures.

Miss Stear kept my letter, with the germ of the scheme, and I may as well give a copy of it here, as it was written on the spot, one day in my dugout in the front line. It shows what I thought about Macedonia at the time, though I may mention that on visiting it since the war I have modified my opinion, for it is really an extraordinarily fertile country, and has a wild fascination all of its own.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

1st Company, 1st Battn., — Regiment,  
Somewhere in Macedonia.

*June 6th, 1917.*

Dear —

I never get any papers. I suppose the Censor or the Powers that Be stop them, so I do not know much of what is going on in the rest of the world, but when the Germans have had a victory the Bulgars shout the news across to us at night from their trenches, and we reply with some tremendous advance of the Allies —sometimes made up on the spur of the moment. The Bulgars start by shouting "Stop shooting, brothers, and we'll tell you some news." I do get letters and parcels all right, though, perhaps my friends may evince a burning desire to send me chocolates or Egyptian cigarettes. Of course the men get nothing at all, most of them have not had a parcel or a letter from home for nearly three years, and do not know what has happened to their families, as the whole of Serbia is in the hands of the enemy. I wish people at home who send things to "lonely soldiers" would adopt a few of us. We are an entire army of lonely soldiers, there can't be anyone half so lonely in the British Army, and they are so keen on everything English, and prize anything from England so much.

There are 120 men in my company, and if anyone would send me any parcels I would distribute them. I had fifty francs given me by the people in a hotel near Tunis. I am going to spend it on sugar for some of the men; it is not in our rations, and is very



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dear, so they cannot buy it for themselves, as they only get ten francs a month pay.

I picked up an old Bulgarian shell just outside my dugout yesterday, and my batman has just brought me in a big bunch of wildflowers to put in it. These he found down at the little stream which trickles through the ravine, whither he went to do my washing. We only carry one change of underclothes with us. We are spared many of the minor worries of Life at the Front, washerwomen and starched clothes among them. The only thing we are really particular about is having our boots cleaned, Heaven only knows why. My batman is distressed because I forgot to bring any boot polish, but he is going to get some as speedily as possible, in the meantime he has to rub them with fat, which is much better for the leather, if not quite so ikey-looking.

This certainly is the most infernal country, bar none. Freezing cold and knee-deep in mud and snow in winter, scorching in summer, and in most places—the places where the lot of the lonely soldier is chiefly cast—heart-breakingly steep hills where we are perpetually on the move, covered with nothing but stones that cut your feet to pieces; without a scrap of shade and frequently without water, reeking with the worst kind of malaria (not so much in these hills where we are now, though, as in the plains) and swarming with flies, mosquitoes and every creeping thing. By day you can fry eggs in your hat—if you are a millionaire, and can buy eggs, and want to do such a messy thing—and as soon as the sun sets you shiver. Smothered in dust except when it rains like a waterfall, which usually happens when you are

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

going on your own weary feet from "somewhere" to "somewhere else." It seems queer that they have always waged war for centuries for the possession of Macedonia. To my mind it is the sort of place you would give away with a pound of tea. Of course, there *are* fertile valleys and villages, mostly in ruins now, but we never spend our days there. Throw in an unlimited supply of shells from howitzers, .75's, aeroplanes, machine guns, trench mortars, bombs of sundry make, and rifle-fire, and an enemy who makes a practice of dropping bombs on the Red Cross whenever he sees it, and who first mutilates and then cuts his prisoners' throats, and you have a really tophole little corner of the Earth. However, there's nothing like getting used to things."

## CHAPTER VII

### A RELAPSE AND A LECTURE

A rising in Serbia—Visiting the “Hurrishnja Odelenja ”—In Hospital again—Home on sick leave—Mrs. Haverfield’s Canteen Fund—My first Lecture—Over in France—Speaking at the Y.M.C.A. Huts—Jolly audiences—Lunch with the General—“ Dropping a brick.”

During this summer of 1916 there was a rising in Serbia, principally centred in the villages round about Nish and Prokuplja, and for a time so successful that it held the Bulgarian Army completely at bay; but eventually German troops came down and exacted a terrible retribution, for they burnt about forty villages, and massacred the inhabitants wholesale. During this rising even the Serbian women, girls and boys carried arms, which had been buried when the country was overrun by the enemy.

One of these was a girl whom I saw afterwards in Belgrade, walking with a wooden leg made by herself. She had been wounded, taken prisoner, and sent to Sophia, where her leg had been amputated. She then escaped, made her way back to Serbia, and lived up in the mountains till the Serbian Army came back again.

Another girl made her way through the Bulgar lines



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dressed as a man, in company with her father and a sergeant. The sergeant was one of our spies, who had been sent through into Serbia, and was on his way back with his report. She begged him to take them with him, and he finally agreed, on condition that, if detected by the enemy, he himself was to shoot both her and her father. Dressed as Bulgarian soldiers they travelled for two months, most of the time actually with the Bulgarian transport to which they attached themselves, and without ever being found out. They then slipped through the lines at night. They brought valuable information with them, and her journey ended happily by the finding of the Serbian officer to whom she was engaged.

Towards the end of September we heard that a new unit was being formed called "Hurrishna Odeljna," shock troops, and there was a call for volunteers from each company. This meant an intensified three weeks' training in bombing, etc., under picked officers, somewhere back in the mountains. A great many volunteered, the consequence being that they picked out just those they would have. I was to go in the second lot, immediately the first was made up.

The idea was that the Hurrishna Odeljna would go first into every attack. But the Serb hates innovations, and the non-picked sarcastically asked, "Where did we think they would be while we were doing 'hurrish'? Sitting back, twiddling their thumbs?" As it turned out, in our Division at least, these men were never used as a separate unit, but mixed up with their companies again; and when, the following autumn, the real Offensive did come off, the whole army turned itself into a Hurrishna Odeljna.

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One day, after the first lot had been training a couple of weeks, a private brought me a note from one of the officers in charge of it, telling me to try and get leave, ride back with his man, stay a few days, and see the training. The colonel readily gave me permission.

In those days, there was none of the usual worry attached to paying visits. What shall I pack, and what shall I wear? One just spruced oneself up a bit as far as circumstances allowed, and the host provided blankets and everything necessary. My present host turned out and gave me his little tent, and I used to find his batman waiting every night when I turned in to take off my boots, and tuck me up in bed exactly as he would do for any other officer. In the morning he used to wake me, according to Serbian custom, with a spoonful of jam and a glass of water, followed by a glass of tea, and then bring a jug of water and pour it over my head and hands.

Serbs consider it a dirty custom to put your hands in the basin as we do; someone stands by with a jug and pours it over you. The batman had thoughtfully brought the lieutenant's toothbrush also, and I am sure considered me a very dirty person because I did not use it.

In the morning we watched the men practising with the new "machinski pushka"—sort of Lewis gun—at targets, and they made me try it also. Next day there was a sort of display, and General Wassitch came up to review the new unit and all its work.

At the end of the display there was a mimic battle, which ended, however, in a tragedy. A sergeant and a private blew themselves up with their own bombs, and

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were killed outright. We could never understand exactly what had happened, as the sergeant, especially, was an old and experienced bomber. The general was very much upset, and the rest of the show was stopped at once.

He asked me as I walked back limping beside his horse whether I was tired, and I said no, not liking to own up to it; but my leg had suddenly started hurting again, and next day I cut short my visit and rode back to camp.

When I went to the ambulance the doctor told me I must give up all idea of joining any Hurrishnja Odeljna, and go straight down to Salonique for an operation.

Our vodnik said he had had a presentiment that when I went off to the Hurrishnja Odeljna I was hunting for trouble, and that, as he had already told me when I was wounded, if I would only stay in my proper place with him, or where he could keep an eye on me, such things would not happen. He always held himself responsible for all the men whose lives were in his keeping, and never cared how much he exposed himself when reconnoitring before sending them forward. It was no wonder the men thought so much of him.

I rode to the Divisional ambulance, where the Doctor gave me his own hut, and kept me for two days whilst waiting for a motor ambulance he expected. The ambulance not putting in an appearance, the doctor said I had better get off while I could stick on a horse, as I should have to ride on down to Petalina. It was pretty hard riding, but it had to be done, and at Petalina I got an ambulance from the French, which took me three quarters of the way to Vodena, and



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from there the commandant of the Artillery lent me his own car and chauffeur and put me in the train, as by that time I could hardly stand.

It was an all-night trip, sitting up in a crowded carriage, and I was not looking forward to it, but I had an unexpected stroke of luck. A soldier opposite me struck a match to light his cigarette (the carriages were always in pitch darkness) and gave an exclamation. It was my Nicholas, the same hospital orderly who had taken me down to Salonique when wounded. He at once took charge of me again, made the others move up to let me lie down, and when we got to Salonique found an ambulance, and never left me until he had seen me safely into the Serbian Military Hospital. I don't quite know how I should have managed without him, for he had to lift me out of the train when we arrived and put me on a stretcher.

Some more pieces of bomb were extracted, and I lay in hospital about six weeks; but the doctor absolutely refused to give me a discharge for the Front. On the contrary, he said I would have to go to the Serb convalescent camp for at least two months. As he turned a deaf ear to all my remonstrances I suggested that if I had to "convalesce" anywhere, I might as well do it at home. So he arranged it that way, and I got two months' sick leave to England.

The problem then arose as to how to get out of Salonique. Being a woman and at the same time a soldier led to complications. There were of course no passenger-boats, and the only transports sailing for England were British. I was, therefore, to go on one of these; but when, at the last moment, it was discovered

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that I was a woman, they absolutely refused to take me. The good old British regulations prohibited women on transports. The hospital ship refused also, on the ground that I was a combatant discharged from Hospital, and as such they could not carry me. The only other way was from Santa Quaranta, the Albanian port, cross to Toulon, and from thence by train, but that necessitated a car, and was practically a three days' trip.

In vain I applied for a car, first at G.H.Q., and then at Transport Headquarters, but they would not give me one, alleging shortage of petrol.

In despair, having wasted a week, I went back to the Chief of Staff at G.H.Q., whom I knew well. When I had applied to him before, I had done so respectfully, and as a sergeant addressing the Chief-of-Staff, but it had produced nothing whatsoever. This time I asked him if he would allow me to speak as a friend and not as a sergeant. Thereupon I told him I knew very well that if killed they would put me up a beautiful tombstone, as they had for other Englishwomen who had lost their lives for Serbia, but as a mark of their affection it would not be of the least use to me personally. What I wanted was the loan of a car *now*, while still alive, as my sick leave, the direct result of wounds, was slipping away. He laughed heartily and, quoting the Serb proverb, "till the child howls the mother does not worry," told me to sit down and not be cross with him, while he wrote out a request to the Chief of Transport to give me a Ford car at once, to take me to Santa Quaranta. I got home just in time for Christmas.

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because in uniform, but everyone was so nice to me that I soon got used to it. One morning, I remember I was on my way to the station to catch an early train to Town, from Croydon. I suppose I must have been feeling bad tempered, for, when some old chap stood in the middle of the road gazing at me I sarcastically asked him whether he would like me to stand still so that he could have a better look. But he completely took the wind out of my sails by hastening across the road, shaking hands warmly, and saying his great wish had been to have the pleasure of meeting me. He accompanied me as far as the station, and the incident taught me not to be so snappy on such occasions.

General —— had me up to the War Office to question me about Serbia, though I was unaware that they knew of my existence. Even policemen and taxi-drivers would now and then stop and ask me how little Serbia was getting on.

I had a very busy time during my leave, for I wanted to do something for the men I had left behind. I used to think of them on cold winter nights, keeping their eternal vigil up in the bleak Macedonian mountains, whilst I was lying snug in bed at home.

I wanted warm underclothing, which they were all terribly in need of, and especially did I want to start something to bring a little comfort, however small, into the lives of the old "Cheechas" (literally Uncle—the Serbian name for an old man). These old fellows were unable to be in the front line, but they did the army transport, and in summer heat and winter rain and cold trudged daily anything between twenty-five to fifty kilometres, alongside their pack-horses.

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The Serbian peasant ages quickly. A man of forty is called a "Cheecha," and most of these, whose sons were now taking their places in the firing line, bore the scars of old wounds. To have some kind of a shanty, however small, on their line of route, where the poor old chaps could have a rest and some refreshment, was what I really aimed at.

The Hon. Mrs. Haverfield, who had been with the Serbs both in Serbia and Russia, and who afterwards died in Serbia while working for them, joined forces with me, and together we started the "Sandes-Haverfield Canteen Fund," though strictly speaking they were not canteens at all, but free "tea-gardens" for the "Cheechas," and others passing along the road.

Mrs. Haverfield had already obtained the use of a store-room for packing, etc., also an office; and as all the help was voluntary there were no overhead expenses to be deducted.

My previous experience of the generosity of the British Public in War-time, when I made my first appeal in 1915, had taught me how necessary a proper organization was. It is comparatively easy to appeal for funds, but the really hard, uninteresting work of tackling correspondence, packing cases, and generally turning oneself into an errand boy, is done by voluntary workers behind the scenes, whom no one ever hears of, but who are unselfishly devoting their whole time and energies to the job, whilst the organizers stand in the limelight.

So many charities were appealing for funds, but I felt sure that if I could touch the hearts of people by a picture of the Serbian Army as I had last seen it, they



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would respond. By the courtesy of the "Morning Post" I was able to publish a letter, which was afterwards distributed in pamphlet form.

I wound up this letter by giving Mrs. Haverfield's address, and soon subscriptions and clothing began to pour in.

I had never spoken in public in my life, and had any of the many palmists who have in the past tried to read my hand ever told me I was to do such a thing, I should have been even more incredulous than had they told me I should one day be a soldier. Several years before, however, one had managed to hit the nail on the head, for she told me I should become notorious through the Press; a prognostication which rather alarmed me at the time. It came true, however, and in consequence I spent half my time trying to dodge reporters.

The first time I ever did speak was at the Alhambra—rather a big place to make one's début—at a benefit *matinée* kindly got up by Miss Lilian Braithwaite in aid of our fund.

I was to make a ten minutes' speech in the middle, after which there would be a collection among the audience: and to say that I was frightened would be putting it mildly.

On the eventful day I was standing all alone in the wings, literally shivering, when a young flying officer, watching the show from the wings, took pity on me and began talking. He was just back from the Western Front after a bad flying accident, and had his arm in a sling. He was going back as soon as he was well, and was so cheery and optimistic that he imparted a little of his own courage to me. So, from that moment,

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I began to buck up and determine that, if once I could make my legs carry me as far as the centre of that enormous, empty stage, I would make a speech that would be heard, or die in the attempt. Whoever that young officer may have been—I never saw him before or since—I owe him an undying debt of gratitude.

I had spent nights rehearsing to myself a really beautiful speech, and learning it off by heart, but now, standing there in the wings, I could not remember a single word, and told him so.

"Never mind what you say," he whispered encouragingly, when the fatal moment arrived. "Just go on and say anything, they won't hear it anyhow."

But, when I actually found myself standing alone, in uniform, in the middle of that vast expanse of stage, feeling about the size of a peanut, and facing a packed house which looked, to my dazzled eyes, as though it stretched away for several kilometres, a voice, which did not sound at all like my own made some kind of a speech. I have never really had the slightest idea what I did say, but I knew some of the audience were crying, and we got the biggest collection ever taken there at a charity matinée; and my young flying friend patted my shoulder and emptied his pocket-book into my hands.

And so the ice was broken; for, knowing that I could at least say *something* that would be heard, and would not be struck dumb—a thing I had been most afraid of—a friend on the London Coal Exchange got permission to take me there for a five minutes' speech, and the fund benefited by over £700. Some little War souvenirs I had brought with me were put up to auction, and my own swagger-cane, made by a soldier

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at the Front, which the winner sportingly handed back to me. Then we went up to Leeds and did the same thing over again.

Mrs. Haverfield, meanwhile, was working hard. She was lecturing, visiting girls' schools and colleges, and collecting supplies; while Miss Simonis, our chief voluntary helper, whom we depended on for a hundred and one things, was keeping the flag flying behind the scenes, sorting and packing clothing all day.

Various societies sent us soldiers' underclothes, and the Australian Red Cross later on gave us enormous quantities, and thousands of pairs of warm, hand-knitted socks.

For the birth of the idea of clothing the soldiers I had to thank the British Red Cross representative in Salonique. I asked him for twelve pairs of socks for my own men, as, while waiting for a car to Santa Quaranta, I paid a flying visit to the Front. The reply was that such work was the business of the Serbian Government, and that I "could not expect to clothe the whole Army." The idea of clothing anything more than my own decetina had never even entered my head, but, as they say in Ireland, "If you want a pig to go straight ahead, you must pull it the other way," so I immediately began to wonder, why not?

We did not clothe the whole army, but we did eventually clothe the whole of the Morava Division of which my regiment formed part, most of the First Army, and thousands of other men besides. Every bundle containing shirts, pants and socks was handed, by Miss MacGlade, who ran the canteens attached to the First Army, personally into the hands of the man



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for whom it was intended. By so doing the men felt they were not forgotten, that people in England were thinking of them, that it was a personal gift, and not equipment dished out by the Government. Before I went back to Serbia I was summoned to an audience with the late Queen Alexandra, and thought I had never met anybody with such easy and charming manners.

When I received the Royal Command I was suddenly smitten with consternation in case she disapproved of women in breeches, and I had nothing but uniform with me ; but in answer to my enquiry got a wire back from Colonel S—— to come as I was.

It was a Sunday morning, and I was received by myself. When I was ushered into the big Reception Room, Queen Alexandra came forward and shook hands, and then took me into a side room to show me a big oil painting of King Edward, and asked me to write my name in her autograph-book. She asked me if I had any photographs of the war ; I had brought some in my pocket I had taken in the trenches, and she asked if she might keep them. She seemed so interested in the soldiers, and asked so much about them that I quite forgot to feel shy. Princess Victoria came in then, and said she wished she could wear those sort of clothes, and asked if I carried a revolver. I said I did always. " Show it to us," said Queen Alexandra. A service revolver is a bulky thing, and though I usually carried the holster unfastened, that day I had buckled it securely so as not to make a lump on my hip under my tunic. " Hurry up, hurry up ! " laughed Queen Alexandra as I fumbled with the fastening. " Supposing someone was attacking me, and you were all that time getting out

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your revolver." Cautioning them that it was loaded, I handed it to them, pointing out the marks of the same bomb that had hit me.

She said she had fixed Sunday morning because she had more time then, and when, after a long chat, she held out her hand and said good-bye, told me in the most friendly way that I must "come and see her again next time I was home on leave." Though I did not know much about Court etiquette, I at least knew one must not turn one's back on Royalty, and I glanced over my shoulder at the long polished expanse of parquet behind me, and devoutly hoped that it was not as slippery as it looked, and that my spurred top-boots would not trip me up. "Please don't walk out like that," laughed Queen Alexandra, who evidently enjoyed a joke, as she came with me herself as far as the door. And I left, wishing it were possible to "come again," and talk to one who, besides being a Queen, was also such a very lovable old lady.

A few days before my leave was up I went up to the Serbian Legation to get my leave-paper stamped.

"You can't go back just yet," they told me, "you are wanted to go and lecture in the Y.M.C.A. Huts at some of the base camps in France."

"But I can't," I objected, "my time is up; here is my leave paper."

"We are wiring to G.H.Q. in Salonique for an extension of leave for you," they replied imperturbably. "If you really want to help Serbia, and we know you do, then go and lecture as we wish you to."

I was aghast. I, lecture in uniform to British soldiers in France! They would certainly laugh at me. Though

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my experience of those I had met in Corfu and Salonique ought to have taught me at this date that they would do no such thing.

G.H.Q. promptly wired back, "extension of leave till work finished." The War Office sent the necessary permits, and the Serbian Legation, as a reward, gave me a letter to take to the Military Commandant of an area, asking him to let me go right up to the Front line, and, if possible, into the trenches.

It was just at the beginning of the big German Offensive of March, 1918, and had I been a day later should have been stopped crossing at all. When I presented my letter to the general, somewhere up the line, he was awfully nice about it, but said it was absolutely impossible to let anyone at that moment visit the Front. His refusal had nothing to do with my being a woman, for even had I been a general wanting to "joy-ride" he could not have sent me then. The simple reason was that the Allies were being pushed back, and, from hour to hour, no one could tell where the "Front" would be. Had I been a fortnight earlier he would have let me go anywhere. It was bad luck, for I had set my heart on being able to tell the men when I got back what life on the Western Front was like.

This was just when we were fighting "with our backs to the wall," and things looked black indeed. Every day brought news of the fall of a fresh village that barred the road between the enemy and the Coast. Only the fresh drafts, and those hurrying back from leave, were allowed over, and had I not crossed the day I did I should have missed a very wonderful experience, and one I shall never forget.



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I lectured in Calais, Havre, Le Touquet, and one or two other places, for three weeks ; every night in a different Y.M.C.A. hut, with, sometimes, a matinée as well. I had borrowed some lantern slides of Serbia, and had others made from my own photos taken at the Front. With these I lectured for just an hour, and quite long enough, I thought, for soldiers, but it was just about the Serbian soldiers, and the sort of life we led up in the mountains.

I felt very nervous at first as to how they would take such an innovation as a woman lecturer, and in uniform, for most men hate to see women trying to be masculine, but they did not seem to take it that way at all, and the first friendly round of applause that greeted me was reassuring, and told me we were going to be friends.

After that I never enjoyed anything so much in my life as lecturing to the soldiers. They were the jolliest and most attentive and enthusiastic audiences it would be possible to imagine. The Y.M.C.A. huts used to be packed every night, even the doorways, and with men sitting on all the window-sills. Their officers used to come too.

I suppose they liked the lantern slides, or perhaps suffered me because, like themselves, I was soon going to the Front again ; or perhaps it was because there was nothing in my short talk which aimed at educating them or "improving their minds." I was told that sometimes sentries had to be put at the doors to prevent a stampede after they had been coaxed inside to hear some lecture.

They were quick to see a joke, and I loved to hear the way they laughed, so used to put in as many funny

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incidents as I could think of, in addition to those of our bad times.

At the end of the lecture I always went down into the hall, and they used to crowd round to talk and ask questions. One man told me he used to think he had gone through something, but would never grumble again after listening to what I had been telling them. Another, an Australian, pressed something into my hand, whispering, "to bring you back safely," and disappeared into the crowd. When I opened my hand I found in it a tiny boomerang made of aluminium. I always wore it afterwards.

Although not customary the Hut Superintendent always put up a box, and anyone who liked could put something in for the Serbian soldiers. What I actually wanted was to have some connecting link between them and my men; something to make the Serbs feel that the British soldier he thought so much of was a real comrade, and I also wanted to take back a couple of Ford cars for the canteens, where they would be so much needed. These, too, would always stand in evidence as gifts from the British tommies.

My dream came true, for officers and men emptied their pockets. In one hut the lady who sold the cigarettes told me she asked one man leaving for the Front that night whether he didn't want to buy some to take with him. He said he had kept his last shilling for that purpose, but had just given it to me instead. I am glad to say she saw that he did not start off without any.

When the cars got out there we had painted on them in big letters, in English and Serbian, "From the British soldiers to their Serbian Comrades," and every man along the road knew them.

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I used to lead up to my appeal for funds by saying I never thought it was much good being just sorry for people if one did not try to do something to help them, and illustrated it by a little yarn. While waiting on a station platform, near Calais, I think it was, I met three dejected British Tommies. They had started home on their long-looked-forward-to leave, and were actually embarked, when the order came that all leave was stopped, as every man was needed. They were then sadly on their way to rejoin their regiment, and had been waiting on the platform for hours, not being allowed to leave the station. I told them I was a soldier too, and they listened politely, but evidently believed not a word of it. As there was nothing to stop me I went off to get something to eat, and a bright idea struck me to bring them back a bottle of beer each. "*Now* we know you are a *real* soldier," they exclaimed gratefully. This thin story invariably made a hit, and the men used to laugh and cheer till the place sounded like a football match.

After all these years it is nice to look back again, and remember what these men were like when things were at their very blackest.

One night, at Le Touquet, there was a concert got up for the men by one of the officers. The large audience was unusually quiet and subdued. In the middle of it the officer in question whispered to me: "The news from the Front is much worse, and the men are awfully down. Get up on the platform and say something to them." I had no idea what to say, but did as I was asked.

What I said I don't exactly know, but I do remember

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telling them I was going back next week, and what I told my men about the British soldier the whole company would know in a few hours, and the whole regiment next day. What message, therefore, would they send, that they were fed up or that they would "stick" it?

"Tell them we'll stick it," roared eight hundred men with practically one voice.

The God who seemed so near to us all in those days must have been my prompter, for more than one officer came up and thanked me for saying "exactly the right thing."

Among the papers the War Office sent me was one particularly cautioning me that I was not to mention numbers, the whereabouts of any regiments, or, in fact, give any information of any kind to anybody. One afternoon, while waiting to lecture, a captain strolled in, introduced himself, and began chatting. Presently he asked me casually how many there were in the Serbian Army.

"Oh, I couldn't say exactly," I said. "I have been away for some time."

"Are there a hundred thousand?"

"It's hard to tell," I replied evasively. "Men are coming back from hospital all the time."

"Are there fifty thousand, do you think?" he persisted.

He was a captain, and I was a non-com., so I could not tell him point-blank to mind his own business.

"Don't know how many there are in your own Army?" he exclaimed, sarcastically, "and you are supposed to be a sergeant-major."



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This was too much for me, so he got what he was asking for.

"I *do* know," I said very shortly, "but I am not allowed to tell you."

Immediately his manner changed, and a broad grin spread over his face. "Thank you very much," he said, "that's all I wanted to know. I'm the Censor here, and it's my business to find out the people who talk."

While we were still chatting another officer appeared in the doorway—I believe, myself, they had had a bet on that they would make me talk—but this time I was prepared. After a few remarks he asked conversationally, glancing at the number on my shoulder-straps, "I see you are in the 2nd Regiment. Whereabouts did you leave them?"

"Oh, up-country from Salonique," I replied promptly, with the air of imparting a great secret, and they both laughed and gave it up.

This incident was the cause of my committing a fearful *faux pas* a few days later, when lunching with an old, English general, and a rather important one at that.

In the middle of lunch, in front of everyone, he asked me identically the same question about the numbers in the Serbian Army, and I, thinking of course it was another catch, said quite politely that I was not allowed to tell.

"Huff-puff," spluttered the general, crimson in the face with rage, "do you take me for a d—— spy?"

I apologized, and tried to explain, for, to make it more awkward still, I was his specially invited guest. But he refused to be mollified, or to talk to me any more,

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and I felt that he at least had no further use for women soldiers. The story got about, and I was badly chipped, though it was admitted that it was really the old chap's own fault for asking such a question in public.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ENEMY CHASING

Back at "Starovenski Redoubt"—Our canteens at Petalina—What the "Cheechas" thought of them—The Big Offensive at last—Chasing the enemy over the mountains.

Mrs. Haverfield was still carrying on with our Canteen Fund, so that, as soon as I got back from France, I went out to Serbia again, taking with me a friend, a Miss Coates, as chauffeur for one of our Ford cars.

The Italians were now occupying Santa Quaranta, and gave us permits to join one of the big convoys of Italian motor lorries, which went right across Albania, a three days' trip, along a magnificent new road as far as Bitolj. There were over a hundred of these big Fiat lorries. I sat beside the driver on the first, Miss Coates on the second, and as we wound up and up in a series of hairpin-bends we could look down upon the tail of our long convoy far below us.

My driver let me drive part of the way, and on one occasion we had been going along happily for some time when he suddenly grabbed the wheel from me. "Quick, change places," he exclaimed. We scramblingly changed places, I wondering what on earth was

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the matter, just as a big touring car full of Italian officers shot round the corner.

"If they had seen me giving the wheel to a passenger I'd have lost my job, and been sent into the Front line to-morrow," he explained.

When I finally arrived back at Staravenski Redoubt I found everything much the same, excepting that I missed our vodnik. A shell had burst close to him and the concussion flung him several yards. He was thought to be dead when picked up, but examination showed no wounds and bad concussion. He was still ill in Salonique.

The canteens were already in full swing, under the direction of Miss MacGlade, who had been with the Serbs a long time, and could talk Serbian. The main canteen for the First Army was placed at Petalina, not far from Grunishta, the Divisional Headquarters, and as near the Front as possible. It was an exceedingly picturesque little spot, built on a slope immediately above the main road where all the "Cheechas" passed, with lovely views stretching over the mountains, and across the plain to Bitolj in the far distance.

Miss Simmonds, who had come back too, had lent us her batman, Jovan. This man was a genius; the whole place had been built entirely of empty petrol tins, and packing cases marked "Sandes-Haverfield Canteens," under his direction, and without costing us a penny.

There was a wooden hut for Miss MacGlade and Miss Coates, another for Jovan, a dear old "Cheecha," and another younger soldier who worked for us, and a third for a kitchen where enormous caldrons of hot water



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were always kept going for the tea which was handed out from early morning till late at night. In front of the huts lay a little garden, with a row of upright stakes surmounted by empty condensed milk-tins, painted alternately scarlet and bright blue—Jovan's idea—in imitation, I suppose, of the coloured glass balls usually seen in a German tea-garden.

An arbour made of woven boughs faced the road, and under its shade were rough wooden tables and benches, where any soldier tramping along the hot dusty road could rest, have a mug of very sweet tea, or lemonade, and a cigarette, gratis. Just in front of the arbour stood a little row of wooden crosses, the aftermath of some engagement, and Miss MacGlade at first objected that it was not a cheerful place to sit near and drink tea. Jovan, however, reassured her by saying that the Serbs liked contemplating graveyards. It was certainly the only peaceful little spot anywhere in the neighbourhood.

It was only a small affair, but it seemed to be appreciated, if one judged by the numbers of men who dropped in, and by the remark I overheard one old fellow make as he was handed his mug of tea and cigarette. "Well, whoever it was thought of this place didn't have a bad thought," he muttered, crossing himself devoutly. It was the only place for miles with a scrap of shade, or a drop of water.

Divisional Headquarters were frequently shelled, and one day the enemy took it into their heads to shell Petalina also, the consequence being that the canteen had a narrow escape, and so had Miss MacGlade, but she carried on just the same.

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One of the first officers I asked after, when I got back, was Lieutenant D——, the 1st Vodnik. Sergeant Miladin replied that, at the moment, he and his whole vod were at a sort of outpost in No-man's Land; he also suggested we should go and pay them a visit one night.

The night we chose was an exceedingly dark one, but Miladin said he knew exactly where they were. So we wandered round and about for some time without finding them, and then, to our surprise, came to the opening of a very deep trench. The soil down there was fairly soft, and the empty trench about eight feet deep. Very puzzled, Miladin said he must have lost his way, as he had never seen this before, though he thought he knew the ground well. We, however, went along it till we reached a spot at which it turned at a sharp right-angle, and then stood paralysed. Just round the corner were men moving about, and we thought, in the darkness, we must have wandered further down and have got into a Bulgar trench!

To climb out without making a noise was impossible; the sides were perpendicular, with no foothold at all; the section of trench which had been empty when we came along might be by now filled with Bulgars; nor had we any idea how many there might be round the traverse. But we could hear a low murmur of voices, so Miladin put his ear to the earth and listened, and, to our unutterable relief, he could hear Lieutenant D——'s voice give an order in Serbian. Rounding the corner we found him seated before a tiny fire, making tea. He told us he had moved that night from his old pitch, and that it was not surprising Miladin had never seen

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the trench before, as it had only been dug during the last two nights. He laughed when we told him the "jump" we had had, but put a sentry in case his next party of visitors might be Bulgars.

We had few casualties that summer, so that those we did have were perhaps more deeply felt. One man in our vod, named Datza, was a great favourite with everybody. He had a genius for getting into trouble, and was the despair of his officers, but much was forgiven him on account of his beautiful voice, and his fund of good humour and funny stories, which were a great asset in keeping up the morale of the company, and cheering up his homesick comrades. It was not so much that he did not do what he ought, as that he did every imaginable thing he ought not; but everyone liked him, not only in his own company, but throughout the battalion, and his singing was in great request. Even the Bulgars used to keep quiet when, in defiance of all regulations, he would sometimes lift up his voice in the trenches at night.

On the occasion in question we had had a perfectly peaceful night, and had come out at dawn as usual to sleep in our dugouts. Just as we were finishing the midday meal I heard a single crash, and my batman ran in to tell me that Datza had been killed by a shell a few yards from his own dugout. The only casualty, for even the O.C., who was quite close to him, had escaped without a scratch.

Miladin had run out immediately, picked him up in his arms and carried him inside, but he had been killed instantaneously. Lucky Datza. Only the very best deserve that.



(Upper) OUR YODIE AND HIS MEN OUTSIDE A DOG-OUT.  
 (Lower) COMMANDANT DE BATTN, 2d INFANTRY REGIMENT  
 ADDRESSING HIS MEN PRIOR TO THE OFFENSIVE OF  
 SEPT., 1918.



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Had the loss been during an attack we should not have felt so badly about it, but everything had been quiet for so long, and then Datza to be singled out! Not a man in the company would eat any more that day; the Serbian way of showing grief and respect.

Rumours of a coming offensive in the autumn began to float about, and we looked forward with feelings of relief to the end of this monotonous trench existence.

I came near to missing it after all, for at the beginning of August my old wound broke out again, and I had to go into the Serbian Field Hospital at Scotchevir, about halfway down to Salonique. The surgeon who operated said he would put me in the Officers' tent—a concession for a non-com.—unless I would like a small tent to myself, which I said I would. I only just managed to get out of it, rather under protest from the doctor, in time; a week before the offensive on September 14th, 1918.

The day after I rejoined the company we were re-relieved and went into camp for a week, right on the top of Mount Yelak. A lovely place, covered with woods, and with plenty of water. Quite a different place to the bare hills on which we had spent the last two years, and I was in consequence quite fit again before the start of the offensive.

The men were kept fit that week by marching and manoeuvring, but still had a good deal of time to rest. Nothing was of course talked of but the coming offensive. Equipment and reserve rations were distributed, and every day we expected the order to start.

Excitement ran high, and the men were extraordinarily optimistic, though I do not think the officers

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were quite so confident; but everything was said and done to encourage the men, who, as a matter of fact, required no encouragement. Not for one moment did they doubt that they were going to march straight back into Serbia; sweep Bulgars, Germans and Austrians before them like chaff, and, after three years of exile, feel once more the soil of Serbia under their feet. Once back on Serbian ground they said they did not care if they were killed.

Events proved they were right, for we kept the enemy on the run, and went forward at such a pace that we astonished everybody.

The Serbian soldier is far better on the mountains than in the plains, and one French soldier told me that no one could keep up with them. The Frenchman thought *he* could march, he said, but his battalion was not halfway up a mountain before the Serbs were on the top.

But then we travelled light. A piece of dry bread left over from yesterday in his knapsack, his toes poking through his dilapidated boots, and with a heart full of confidence, the footslogger headed for home. Artillery, transport, and everything else might follow as best it could.

The Morava Division was not to do the first break through at Sokol and Dobropolje. Another Division, with the French, were to do that. We were then to follow on, relieve them, and carry on. At least that was all we gathered of the plan of campaign, which was bound to be all right if Voyvoda (Field Marshal) Misitch had planned it. This much we thoroughly understood, however, that the enemy, once on the run, was to be allowed no time to stop and reform.

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At last, at 7.30 p.m. on the night of August 31st, the great Day arrived. We started off, marched over the mountains till 1 a.m., then camped.

Sometimes on long marches, when we were not in touch with the enemy, and if anywhere where a horse could go, I was given one; a rather ancient but very sagacious little animal, as active as a cat on the mountains, with only one eye, with which he could see as well in the dark as I could with two in the daytime. Endurance, which he had plenty of, was more important than speed, as one could only go at the same pace as the men on foot. A horse, however, was only an occasional luxury, for presently it was good-bye to all the horses for everybody.

We camped that night, and the whole of the next day and night, beside some of our own batteries, which were shelling the Bulgar positions, and the din was absolutely terrific. "Prvi topf, pali, Drugi topf, pali" (First gun, fire. Second gun, fire). All day and all night it kept up. We had never endured such an incessant, ear-splitting noise before.

We were still waiting for the break-through, tokens of which we saw by the numbers of wounded carried past us on mules or stretchers, when, at 6.30 a.m., Sergeant-Major Milosh poked his head into my little bivouac-tent, and told me to hurry as we were starting immediately. So, in desperate haste, I pulled on my boots, and then waited with the rest of my company till 3.30 in the afternoon. Then came a short march, and a halt at 8 p.m., for the night, when we heard, to our joy, that Sokol and Dobropolje, both supposed to be practically impregnable positions, had been taken.

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We were forbidden to light fires, and forgetful of the fact that we were high up, and the nights would be cold, I lay down on the grass, pulled my overcoat over my head, and instantly fell asleep. In winter, we had been obliged to crowd up together when sleeping without blankets in the open if we ever wanted to wake again.

Our machine gun captain, noticing a heap by itself, came over to see whether it was dead or alive.

"Who are you?" he asked. I woke and sat up in answer to a gentle kick. "Heavens, Sandes, what are you thinking of, going to sleep like this by yourself, have you gone mad? You'll be frozen to death by the morning."

It would have been no earthly use giving us blankets; we should have thrown them away, as we did everything else which impeded our progress, excepting rifle, ammunition, haversack and waterbottle. The pack the men dared not discard for fear of punishment, but it was more often than not quite empty.

The artillery- and machine-gunners had a big pull over us. They are the aristocrats of the army, and carry all sorts of luxuries on their mules or gun-limbers, so, when the captain said he had a small heap of straw and two blankets, I gladly changed my quarters. I was awakened up in the night though, by some of our cavalry squadrons passing nonchalantly through the middle of us, and found, at the same time, that it was freezing hard. So I sat up to have a look at them, and thought I had never seen anything so lovely as our little plateau. It lay all white and shining with frost under the full moon, while hundreds of camp-fires on the surrounding hills twinkled in the clear, frosty air.



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We turned out before dawn, started at 7 a.m., and marched all day with hardly a stop till 10 p.m. The Commandant of battalion, Major Z——, passed me as I plodded along, called out that he had had to send his adjutant off somewhere, and that I could take the absentee's horse and ride with him as his adjutant. This was a stroke of luck.

We rode in dead silence for the last few miles, and it was getting dark. Both of us were cold, tired and hungry, when I rejoiced to see the lights of our camp-fire shining through the trees just ahead. At this point Major Z—— suddenly turned his head to speak to me, for nothing would induce the adjutant's horse to keep abreast of his. It knew its place, if I did not, to be half a length behind the commandant.

"You very tired, Sandes?"

"No thanks," I replied, wondering what was coming.

"Then ride back to those cross-roads, about eight kilometres back, wait there, and guide the battalion in."

"Razumem" (I understand). The regulation answer to an order, and, with a last wistful glance at these camp-fires, I turned my horse's head, thinking perhaps the adjutant's job was not always such a soft snap as it looked.

This was a new commandant who had joined the battalion early in the summer. On duty officers and men feared his bitter tongue and overbearing manner, but off duty he was full of fun. One company was always held in reserve near the Battalion Staff, and when it happened to be the 1st he always sent an ordonnance over to invite me to supper. The officers did not live

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in luxury while their men starved, as it was said was the case in the Austrian Army. Everyone received the same ration, and any extras were bought out of their own pockets. But he, being Commandant Battalion, could send an orderly to buy whatever was to be had in any of the villages we went near.

We were short of officers, a sergeant-major, one Mallesha being vodnik of our vod now that Lieutenant V—— had gone, and, except on duty, I rarely saw much of our Company O.C., who was not too popular.

One evening, after supper, and following a particularly hard march, during which he had ridden up and down our ranks cursing us, I told Major Z—— I thought he was over-hard on the men when they were doing their level best. We had got in with only a few stragglers (thanks to his tongue), whilst it was reported that the 2nd Battalion had dropped by dozens.

"If a man is really all-in he won't care what I say to him," he explained to me. "Whilst, if it is only his will-power, and not his legs, that has given out, and if he can still stand, he will get up and go on, if I cuss hard enough."

"How did *you* get here," he demanded. "Do you suppose one of those men who fell out was really as tired as you were? You don't walk on your legs at all, you walk on your will-power."

It was quite true; brawn and muscle don't really count for everything on a march. One can often see a delicate lad plugging along while his hefty-looking comrade drops exhausted, simply because the latter can't deceive himself that he can "force his heart and nerve and sinew to serve their turn long after they are done."

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Often, though, I have repeated those lines to myself, but they did not result in making a man of me. But Kipling's "If" had always been a favourite of mine, and when a reporter came to interview me in hospital, in 1916, and asked whether there was anything I particularly wanted, I asked for a copy of the poem, as I could not remember the whole of it. He put my request in the papers, coupled with an entirely fictitious conversation between us, and, in consequence, I was deluged with copies of "If," with kind messages on them from unknown friends in England.

The major was not always so complimentary. One night I was lying by the battalion fire waiting for supper, too dead beat to talk.

"Tired, Sandes?" he asked.

"I am rather," I answered.

"You ought to be ashamed to say it," he retorted severely.

"I didn't say it till you asked me," I replied indignantly.

"That doesn't matter. After a five-minutes' rest a good soldier ought to be ashamed to confess he is tired."

It sounded rather brutal, but he was quite right. He was an old soldier and he knew. Once let yourself go and you are done for.

To do him justice he practised what he preached, and would often have his horse led while he walked alongside the men for hours; and, as he insisted on their sitting down exactly where they stopped when the whistle blew, he would himself sit out in the blazing sun writing his reports, with a patch of shade within a yard of him.

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The Bulgarians were now retreating rapidly, setting fire to the woods behind them, so that, in some places, we went through clouds of choking smoke and hot ashes which burnt our feet. I had an advantage over the men in that I had no pack on my back, and that priceless possession, good, heavy, English marching boots, whilst theirs, none too good at the start, were completely worn through.

The Bulgars, heavily stiffened though they were with German troops, seemed too demoralized to stand and fight, and it was seven days before we really got to grips with them. By "we" I mean my own battalion.

Whilst still dark we were roused in a hurry, and rose from our downy pillows of stone (we used to wonder why Jacob made such a fuss about his!) scrambled along a goat's track, and slid at break-neck speed down a hill covered with thick bushes. Every moment someone would go headlong over a root in the dark, and I remember that, on this occasion, I lost my patent knife-fork-and-spoon which had been thrust into the top of my leggings.

There seemed at the moment to have been no such desperate hurry after all, for when we reached the Cerna Reka (Black River) at the bottom we waited for further orders, and washed ourselves and our handkerchiefs—those who had any.

But, all at once, a French aviator and a Serbian sergeant appeared in our midst as though they had dropped from the blue. This they literally had done, leaving their aeroplane stuck in the tops of some trees.

They were to have gone over to Krivolak, left their machine there, and, getting through the enemy's lines



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disguised, blow up the railway line near Veles with bombs. They had, however, lost their way in the dense mist, and could not locate the Vardar river. After circling round and round they ran out of petrol, and the aeroplane became caught in some trees and tipped up, the pilot escaping with a few cuts. He told us that another pilot had blown up two Bulgar ammunition dumps and a station, and that now another would be sent to blow up the line at Veles which he had failed to do, to his great disappointment.

Neither had any idea where they were, and asked whether we knew the whereabouts of the 2nd Regiment, where the sergeant had to report. Both were overjoyed to find they had fallen into the middle of it. So we lit a little fire and made some Turkish coffee for our unexpected guests, after which they went on, as a few shells were beginning to drop round.

Here we filled up our waterbottles, and well we did so, for we chased the enemy up and down those scorching hills all day long without another drop.

We could hear the 3rd Company having a busy time, too, but there was no news of the 2nd, which lay ahead somewhere on our left. About sunset we were told to hurry, and so, forgetting our fatigue, sprinted up the last bit of hill and had a good view of the Bulgars, and a shot at them. We could also see part of our own 3rd Field Battery in their hands, and heard a sad tale of our 2nd Company. Unable to move all day some of its wounded men had died of thirst, and had had to retire, leaving behind the guns, which were right up in front with them.

Just as it was getting dark, two artillery officers

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came up—one of them the commander of the battery, who had been in some other part with the other two guns when these had been lost. He cursed us (who were nowhere near the spot) and the whole of the infantry, individually and collectively. It must have been awful to lose one's guns, but he was half crazy about it. "I'm going to look for them myself, as you are all no good," he exclaimed; and, in spite of the remonstrances of his companion, who followed him slowly, he plunged down the hillside in the darkness, in the direction of the Bulgars. I do not know what became of him.

The hillsides were all in a blaze that night, for the enemy fired the dry grass as they went, either as a smoke screen for themselves, or to make it more uncomfortable for us.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE VARDAR AND NISH

An Anxious night—The goose with the sore leg—  
Borrowing a dressing-room—We reach the Vardar  
—Ovche Polje—How the Serbs treat their prisoners  
—Marching through the villages—The mothers who  
waited—A false alarm—Nish at last.

The following night we moved up onto a nasty little plateau, with a hillside covered with thick woods, sloping down in front. Very good cover for any attack. We squeezed ourselves into a row of little holes along the edge, each just big enough for two, and looking down into the bushes. The major remarked that he was sure I would be taken prisoner, as it was the same spot from which the 2nd Company had had to retire, but I replied that I was no more likely to get taken prisoner than he, if we gave way, as the Battalion Staff lay only a few yards behind us. What was the good of my staying with him, therefore, and as he had suggested. Anyway, why this sudden fuss? He finally let me go to my proper place.

Sergeant Miladin and I occupied one hole on our extreme left, with the rest of our platoon spread in similar little holes all along our front leading towards the Battalion Staff on the right. A company of the 1st Regiment spread away to left.

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We sat there for some time, straining our eyes into the darkness, and expecting every moment to get a bomb in our faces from the thick undergrowth in front. Of course we had outposts, but the Bulgars had a nasty way of putting these out of action without a sound.

Everything was deadly quiet, and we were all so done from want of sleep that it seemed doubtful how many of us would be able to remain awake. This being so I suggested to Miladin that we should take two-hour watches. He agreed, and I took first watch. He at first strongly demurred to this, but I reminded him that if an attack came it would be much more likely to occur just before dawn; so, making me promise to wake him at the slightest sound, he went off like a top.

It was uncanny. I could just make out the next hole a few yards away with its two crouching figures—whether asleep or awake I could not tell—and beyond that nothing. Every little night animal that squeaked, and every leaf that rustled in the thick bushes a couple of yards ahead, I made sure was a Bulgar creeping up. Twice I could have sworn I saw a face. Miladin slept peacefully, and I knew, if he could but get a good rest before the expected attack he would be worth half a platoon such as I. But I felt very lonely, though wide awake.

At last, after what seemed to me to be about a week, but which was really only an hour and a half by my watch, I heard an unmistakable rustling down below. I listened, and waited, loathing to wake Miladin short of his two hours. It came again, and I knew, this time, that it was not my imagination.

Very gently I whispered in his ear—never wake a



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man in war time by touching him, it scares him out of his senses. He woke silently, took his rifle, whispered to me to keep a good lookout, and disappeared into the undergrowth, taking our nearest neighbour, Petar, with him. For if a Bulgar could worm his way along silently so could they. After some time he came back, saying that he had been right down to the bottom, but could find nothing. Whoever it was had been and gone.

About 3 a.m. the enemy attacked, on our left wing, pelted us with bombs, and a brisk fusillade was kept up for some little time. The front-line Bulgars were armed entirely with bombs, the second with rifles. We grasped our rifles and bombs and waited silently, expecting them to make a simultaneous attack in some other place, as they had done to the 2nd company, but nothing more happened. I suppose they retreated, for at about 6 a.m. we were withdrawn.

Through it all I managed to keep a diary, though a very scrappy one, and as one day would sound very much like another to those who could not fill in from memory all that those short entries bring back to me, I will give the one following that night as a sample. I often went wrong in my dates, as the Serbian calendar is thirteen days behind ours. Sometimes I put both dates, English and Serbian, and sometimes only one, but somehow we always knew when it was Sunday.

*" September 9th? Sunday.*

" Slept directly we left our holes, from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., then off again down through the wood and across the open, up hills, in strelatsky stroy (advance in line in open order). Machine gun on hill bothered us

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rather, but dodged along in short spurts. The major came himself into the front line with us, and the Bulgars took the hint and quit. (N.B.—the men used to say the Bulgars were as much afraid of the major as we were) and we climbed up into their positions. Such a climb! Almost perpendicular rock, where we had to haul ourselves up by our hands to a sort of eagle's nest which any handful of men with any pluck could have held against a regiment. They have cleared out their machine gun. No rest for us; down the other side and on till about 5 p.m., when we stopped on a hill by a wood overlooking the Kavadar-Prilip road. Down below our guns are harrying the retreat and a huge ammunition dump blown up. Tall flames shooting up into the sky, big explosions and clouds of black smoke. Made some coffee about sunset, a lovely blood-red sunset behind the black smoke of the ammunition dump. The others stayed there all night. I went with the 2nd Vod down into the wood, front line outpost. Posted strong sentries, and the exhausted men slept. Slept all right except for one short burst of firing on our left, when we all sat up and took notice. Rather draughty. So far my company has come off lightly, no heavy fighting, and taken our positions easily. The men are splendid, dead tired, almost barefoot, nothing to eat all day till night-fall (supper for us all came this evening at twelve-thirty), They are in the highest of spirits "

Thirst was our worst enemy. We were usually roused up before daylight, and on our way by about 4 a.m., with only one waterbottle full each, to last us the whole day. Food did not worry us, we could not have eaten even if we had had it during the heat of the day, for our

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mouths were too dry even to smoke, and whoever it was who said, "An Army marches on its stomach," did not know the Serbs.

I had heard, or read somewhere, that travellers lost in the desert make their water hold out by just taking a mouthful, rinsing their mouths, and spitting it out, so I tried it. The men round laughed at first, but soon they were doing it, too, and acknowledged that it was better than drinking it all in the first hour.

One day, about high noon, we came to a river and lay down on the banks gulping it out of the palms of our hands and fairly wallowing in it, till we were all soaking. We had never known before what a precious thing water was, and swore to become teetotallers from that day on.

The first essential in the army is what I think sailors call a "raggy." Someone who sticks closer than a brother, and with whom you share all your joys, which are thereby doubled and your sorrows, which are halved. I had two at this time, Sergeant Miladin, and Sergeant-Major Mallesha, the senior S.M., who was acting vodnik. We shared our tobacco, our food, any odds and ends we might sometimes come across en route, such as onions or tomatoes; even our overcoats at night. If anywhere where we might sleep, we would spread one "Shatorski creela" (ground sheet) and pull the other two, and our three overcoats, over us. So we kept tolerably warm.

Looting of any kind was strictly prohibited, and woe betide the man caught at it. I shall never forget one day later on, when we got into the plain, a lot of us—and I one of them, to my shame—got loose in a vineyard alongside the road. The major rode up and

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called us every name he could lay his tongue to, adding that we were worse than the Bulgars, for it was a Serbian vineyard. We had never thought of it in that light, or indeed thought at all, and we came out of it looking like whipped curs.

The Serbian peasantry always remind me of the Irish. They are never at a loss for an apt answer when caught in the act. A soldier was actually caught by his officer one day with a stolen goose.

"Where did you get that goose?" demanded the officer.

"Goose, what goose?" asked the soldier innocently.

"The goose you've got in your knapsack, man. I can see its legs sticking out."

"Oh, is it this poor little thing, you mean," said the man, reluctantly opening his knapsack and displaying a half-grown goose. "I was going along and I met the little creature sitting by the side of the road with a sore leg, and it begged me so piteously to pick it up and carry it for a bit that I hadn't the heart to refuse."

Mirko, a corporal in our vod, was our champion "scrounger," and a generous fellow who always shared everything. One day he found a perfect little goldmine, a whole knapsack full of lump sugar (sugar was not included in our rations) quite legitimately too, for it was a Bulgarian knapsack left behind. A lump of sugar dipped in water is refreshing, and he gave us each a handful. Another day he *bought*—so he said—a whole lamb, and we roasted it on the next halt.

A propos of sugar, the men once found a whole case of saccharine left behind in a German ambulance, and destroyed it, thinking it was some poisonous drug. One



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put a tube into his pocket to show to me, and they bitterly regretted they had not filled their pockets, too, when I told them what it was.

One night, too dead beat to eat at all, I went straight to sleep between Mallesha and Miladin. Some hours later I was wakened by a voice whispering, "Sandes, Sandes, wake up. Could you drink some wine?" Could we do what? We all three sat up, and there was Mirko, with two waterbottles full of wine, and a huge water-melon. "I tried to get a chicken," he said, "but they made such an awful noise." Between us we had bread, a small piece of meat, and some onions which Miladin had found—he and Mallesha having refused to eat their supper either as I could not eat mine—besides Mirko's water-melon and wine, so we made a tablecloth of our ground-sheet, and all four had a gay, midnight meal.

In spite of my good boots I became very footsore, as, indeed, we all were. Our feet were pretty well cut to pieces on those stony mountains, and the men's boots were completely worn out. Lots of them had no soles at all, but they trudged along cheerfully. One day, when resting, some of us had taken off our boots, and Mancha, a Lewis gunner sitting next to me, was groaning about the condition of his feet. I usually soaped my socks, but as I had no more soap (though that was better than having no more socks like the men) I went across and borrowed some thick oil from a mitrailleuse. Mancha watched me smearing it on, and then pulled on his boots again. "I don't think I'll say any more about *my* feet," he remarked. "I wonder you can walk at all."

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In spite of our condition, when we passed hundreds of Austrian prisoners being sent to the rear, in charge only of a couple of boys of about fourteen, all in good uniforms, and with strong, new-looking top-boots, not a thing was taken from them, nor were they molested in any way. The prisoners said they did not know whether they would fare so well in the next village, though, where they would have to run the gauntlet of the women, who had just watched their sons and brothers march through with bleeding feet.

I had left a parcel of clean kit with the soldier who looked after my pack-horse and valise, telling him to send it up to the Battalion Staff if he got a chance, and by anyone coming up. When it arrived the problem arose as to where to get a wash and change. The major was the only one who had a tent up.

"Would you like to turn out and give me your tent for ten minutes," I asked him.

"What for?" he demanded in astonishment.

I explained that I had some clean kit, but nowhere to undress, and that I wanted to borrow his tent for the purpose, also his basin, some water and soap.

"Well, of all the nerve!" he exclaimed. "Did anyone ever before hear of a sergeant calmly requesting his Commandant Battalion to turn out and give him his tent?" But he did so and told his batman to give me anything I wanted. I felt much better after it, for it was the first time I had changed my shirt for ten days. A white flannel one, and hardly recognizable as such.

White flannel may not sound very practical in war time, but it is more so than it looks. Although "cooties" were not quite such a scourge with us as they were on the

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Western Front, as we never had deep dugouts, or straw or blankets to sleep in, odd ones did appear, and, with a still vivid remembrance of our condition during the Albanian Retreat, I had long ago discarded grey flannel. On white they could, at least, be promptly located and dealt with.

Next afternoon, as, with tunics undone and crimson faces, we struggled and stumbled down the last, long hill to camp, the major passed us.

"Tired, Sandes?" he sang out.

"No thanks," I said as cheerfully as I could, mindful of his previous, scathing remarks about a good soldier.

"Have you got a pocket looking-glass about you?" he said, reining in his horse. He spoke quite seriously, but I thought I saw a twinkle in his eye. Every man carried a small looking-glass in his tunic pocket, though he did not use it quite so obtrusively as the flappers do nowadays.

"No, I am sorry. I have lost mine," I answered, wondering whether he wanted to borrow it, or where the catch lay.

"Humph, then it's a pity you can't look at yourself, and see how you look when you are *not* tired," was his parting shot over his shoulder. I had swallowed the bait, hook and all.

When beside the Vardar river three Italian soldiers appeared out of the bushes on the banks, and hailed us. One of them spoke very good English. They told us they had been prisoners for eighteen months with the Germans, and when they heard rumours of our advance they escaped, and had been hiding in the bushes till the last of the Germans had disappeared. They had

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their pockets well filled with supplies, and they and our men fraternized at once, and seemed to be able to understand each other. But nobody knew what to do with them, and the O.C. was nowhere to be seen.

The major sat near by on a camp-stool writing out something urgent, and he always hated being interrupted on these occasions. We should be moving on in a few minutes, and could not possibly take them with us, nor turn them loose to fend for themselves, as they had handed themselves over to my vod. I had, therefore, to go and beard him.

"Throw them in the river—and yourself after them," he snapped, without looking up.

I replied "Razumem" (I understand) and turned on my heel, wishing I could meet him in civil life and get my own back, also wondering what to do with them. But I had only gone a few yards when he called after me to send them with an escort to Divisional Headquarters.

We spent the day on a hot, bare hillside, but the next afternoon the men were all brought down to bathe.

Before dawn on the following morning the whole regiment was collected on the banks of the Vardar, and the men took off their boots and trousers, and waded across by companies. The scene was rather ludicrous, and I remember thinking what a fix we should have been in if the enemy had attacked. I was not subjected to the same ordeal, for an officer lent me his horse to ride across on.

We went ahead rapidly now, and on Ovche Polje (Sheep's Meadow), a big undulating plain, we advanced



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twenty-five kilometres in one day, fighting all the way, and ousting the enemy from one position after another. Every man seemed to go straight ahead on his own initiative. There was no holding them back. Our vod fought away out on the left wing, and when it began to get dark we seemed to be all alone, so retired a little way to rejoin the rest of the company, limping and footsore, but very much bucked at having got the farthest ahead.

It was a keen and bitter disappointment for all ranks when we heard a few days later that the Bulgars had asked for an Armistice, and that we were not to pursue them into Bulgaria.

We were at Crna Vrk (Black Peak) almost on the borders of Bulgaria, when the news came. Divisional Headquarters were there, too, and the Commandant of the Division himself told me the news. It was all so different to our expectations, and there was no rejoicing at all.

There we were, stopped by our Allies in the full flush of victory we had been through so much to gain; on the borders of Bulgaria, and yet not allowed to go any further. It appears the French thought the Serbs would revenge themselves by committing atrocities on the Bulgarians as a reprisal for those done in Serbia; so they sent black troops instead. These, in addition to frightening the women and children, did far worse things in the way of wanton cruelty (if one can believe all one hears) than ever the Serbs would have done.

The Serb and the Bulgar may be half-brothers, but they have no resemblance in character. The Serbs are

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fighters, and would have gone with a mailed fist into their life-long enemy's country, but, to anyone who knows them, the idea that they would have revenged themselves by killing and torturing women and children, as the Bulgars did in Serbia, is not to be thought of. They treated their prisoners kindly, but could not give them what they had not got themselves.

We had, alas, more than enough evidence that many of our men who had fallen into the Bulgar's hands had been tortured and roasted alive. The Serb is as ready with his knife as the next man, but, though I have sat and listened to men making blood-curdling threats to the address of the next Bulgar they caught alive, what they actually did do when they found a wounded Bulgar was to give him a cigarette and a drink from their own much cherished water-bottle. This I have seen over and over again.

On one occasion three of the men called to me to have a shooting match, to prove which was the best shot. There had always been keen rivalry between us.

"What's the target?" I asked, and they pointed to a distant heap lying under a rock about 800 metres up the hillside.

"Why, it must be a wounded Bulgar," I said, throwing down my rifle in disgust. "What plucky chaps you are! Why don't you shoot at a man who can return your fire?"

"You're quite right, we never thought what we were doing, we're ashamed of ourselves," one of them said, and all put down their rifles.

On another occasion the adjutant found a very sick Bulgar lying in the reeds by the river, where the enemy

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had made a short halt. "There!" he said. "I've taken a prisoner all on his own, which is more than you have been able to do in the front line." The colonel sent for the doctor, and the whole Staff worried about the best way to have the wretched man properly cared for, as they were moving on in a few minutes!

One of our captains obtained two days' leave to visit his home after an absence of four years. Struck by his face when he arrived back I asked another officer the reason, and he told me his comrade had just learnt that, in the rising in 1917, his old mother had first been burnt with hot irons, then, two days later, beaten to death with green canes by the Bulgars, because she would not disclose the whereabouts of some of the rebels who were in hiding up in the mountains.

The weather broke about the beginning of October, and for eight days it poured incessantly. The roads were churned up into thick mud inches deep, and we were always soaked.

It was pelting so hard one night that the major said I could share his luxurious quarters in a house owned by a Turk; so he, his adjutant, Captain L——, and I, slept on the floor of the downstairs room (the harem was upstairs). To judge by the fleas, my sleeping place must, in normal times, have been the chicken roost, but at least it was dry. The men had a broken shed in the yard. In the morning the major told our host that I had never seen a harem, so the Turk took me upstairs to see his various wives. There was not much of the Arabian Nights' flavour about it; just a bare room containing half a dozen women, most of them hideous, old hags, and one very pretty girl whom I supposed to be the latest wife.

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They all screeched and covered their faces when I came in, and it was a long time before I could persuade them that I was a woman.

Our forward movement was now bringing us near Nish, the largest town in Serbia after Belgrade, and we were passing through the district from which the 2nd Regiment was recruited, but none were allowed to visit their homes, though the men pleaded that they were only an hour's walk. They had not heard from home for four years, and many of them wept outright with disappointment. The people in this part were terribly poor. The Bulgars had driven off all their stock, and had taken every single thing they possessed. Everywhere were ruined cottages, and on every hand we heard terrible tales of cruelty.

Ours was a triumphal march now through every village. Flags were hung out at once, though our cavalry patrols were often clearing the last of the enemy out of one end as we entered at the other. Everybody turned out to greet us, pressed chunks of rye bread, wine and fruit upon us, and apologized for having nothing better to give. One old chap put a piece of black bread into my hand, saying, "Here, lad, take this, you must be hungry." I looked just like the rest, of course, ragged, thin and sunburnt, but the men in front would often tell the villagers about me, and, generally speaking, before we got through a village I had made everyone's acquaintance.

It was pathetic to see the rows of old mothers waiting along the highway, each with a basket of home-made provisions for her boy. Some had walked long distances from outlying villages, and as we passed they eagerly



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scanned each face for the one they hoped to see. "Where's Marco?" one would call, or "Where's Jovan Simovitch?" and so on. If not with us the men would call back that he was somewhere behind, and she would wait patiently, hopefully. "Is he really behind?" I asked the man next me on one occasion; for they all knew each other. "How could I tell her he died of hunger in Albania?" he replied.

Sometimes a whole group would find at least one of those they had come to meet, for there were often half a dozen brothers from one family, and then there would be hugging and rejoicing, and the whole lot would fall into step with us as we marched on, followed by the wistful eyes of those still patiently waiting.

Sometimes a man would call out to know why mother had not come, or where father was, too often to be told they had died or been killed, or that their cottage was burnt down and themselves sent away into Bulgaria. Till it seemed, as one man said bitterly, as though all the mothers who were left had lost their sons, and all the boys who did come home their mothers. Sometimes the wives came too, chaperoned by all the rest of the family, but I fancy it was not considered quite the thing to make such a display of affection in public.

We had now done with the Bulgars, and had only Germans and Austrians against us; and great numbers of the latter, mostly Czechs, were giving themselves up every day.

Nish was soon taken, the enemy clearing out at one end of the town as the Serbs came in at the other, with a certain amount of fighting in the streets; but, to our disappointment, whilst the 2nd and 3rd Battalions

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came in at the tail end of it, we, the 1st Battalion, were sent up into the hills overlooking the town as a rear-guard.

On the way there occurred a funny incident. My company was peacefully marching along the road, when, suddenly, at the entrance to a village, we heard a fearful screeching intermingled with howling, and saw all the women and children collected in a field in front of the first cottages.

"Fix bayonets!" shouted the astonished O.C., thinking the Germans were about to attack our column on the road, and were using the women and children as a screen—a favourite trick of theirs.

"2nd Vod, in open order, forward," and we scrambled over the ditch and legged it up that ploughed field in attacking formation, ten paces between each man, and the decetar three paces behind his decetina to see that it kept its alignment. The other three vods were held in reserve.

The nearer we got to the women the louder they shrieked, and still the supposed Germans held their fire.

"Don't kill us," they shrieked.

"Where are the Germans?"

"Aren't you Schwabes?" (Austrians).

"We, Schwabes!" we called back. "We're Serbs. Your brothers. Don't you know us? Who's behind you?"

"Nobody!"

They had never before seen Serbs in steel helmets, which of course we were all wearing, and, missing the familiar "shycatcher," the distinctive Serbian cap, which is the national head-dress among civilians as well

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as in the army, had jumped to the conclusion that we were the enemy about to attack their village.

When convinced, they fell on our necks and gave us a great reception, so we all stayed there the night. The 1st, 2nd and 4th Vods surrounded the village, at a little distance, to guard it, and the 3rd, with the O.C., camped in a cottage, where we pictured to ourselves the time the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were having, being fêted in Nish. "There you are," said Mancha to me, "we have been talking for years about getting to Nish, and now here's Nish for you—a muddy field and pouring rain."

The women became very curious about me, for after supper some of them came to our camp-fire and carried me off to one of their cottages, where I sat on a three-legged stool—the only furniture left them—and drank coffee, whilst they all squatted on the mud floor talking and asking questions.

Though I could understand the men perfectly I could not understand half the women said. They talked too fast, and their voices were very shrill, unlike the men who have rather soft voices. I was beginning to feel rather dazed, so was relieved when a couple of the men came in, laughing and saying they had been hunting for me everywhere, and had come "to take care of me."

All the men were, of course, very eager to gather news of their families, and these villagers seemed to know the fate of everyone for miles round. They told us how everything they had not managed to bury had been "requisitioned," and that only just enough maize was left to keep them alive. Even the children's tin spoons were taken away. They said the Germans paid whatever

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was asked, but that the Bulgars just took. Most of the villages where the rising took place in 1917 had been burnt down, with wholesale massacre and looting.

It was not a very cheerful home-coming for the army, and small wonder there was no great "Armistice night" in Serbia.

The Serb excels as a "passive resister"—when he is not an active one—and the women made us laugh when they described how the Bulgars would try to force their language—very similar to Serbian—on them, and how they used to shake their heads and pretend they could not understand a word. I asked one woman what name she had given her baby, born after her husband's departure, and she said, "Slobodan" ("Freedom") Not a bad name to give a kiddie while you are lodging the enemy.

The civilians were all full of tales of woe, while the soldiers, as usual, made very light of theirs. I noticed the same thing everywhere. "You can have no idea of what the hardships were, and what the Bulgars are like." Hadn't we, though. The men usually smiled and held their tongues.

One of the men in my decetina, Dragoutini, had been lucky enough to find both his parents, who hunted him up in camp. He brought them up and introduced them, and we all sat round the fire most of the night, hearing the news. His mother produced a big bottle of milk out of her well-filled basket, the contents of which she had insisted on all sharing equally.

"Dragoutini has always been accustomed to my bringing him a big glass of hot milk every morning directly he wakes," she explained, "and I have always





(Upper) SERJEANT SANDHUS TALKS WITH HIS COLOREL.  
 (Lower) SERJEANT SANDHUS WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN  
 BEHIND BRIDEGROOM.

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been so worried thinking perhaps he did not get it regularly at the Front."

Her son was a big, husky-looking chap. Hot milk indeed! the men grinned.

"Why, mother," he said, "you shouldn't have worried about me. I had everything I wanted. Didn't I, you chaps?"

"Of course he did, mother," they all chimed in, rising gallantly to the occasion. "Dragoutini's hot milk was brought up to him in the trenches regularly, every morning, and the French gave us coffee and tea, and everything you could think of, and—and *chocolate*." The highest pinnacle of luxury their imagination could soar to.

"Oh, I'm so glad," said mother, smiling happily as she patted her son's hand. "He's my only one (girls don't count), and I was so afraid he would not get all the little comforts he got at home." It was well for her peace of mind that she would never know how her precious lamb had really passed those years.

The Germans had saved some of their guns, and, whenever we stopped in a village, they bombarded it, and our route. In consequence the whole battalion moved onto a hill known as "Popovi Glava" (Pope's Head), and then aeroplanes came over and dropped bombs. From here we could see the smoke from the railway station, and the quantities of trucks the enemy had left as a blazing trail behind them.

Here we stayed three or four days, so that I did see Nish after all. The colonel, and the Commandant of Battalion, both lived there, so they took me to their homes and introduced me to their families. I actually

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stayed at the major's house, where we had a hilarious time, and, one evening, the Chief of Staff of the First Army came round and invited me to supper with Voyvoda Misitch. So my experiences of Nish were varied. One night sleeping in mud and rain round a camp-fire with the men, and the next dining with the Commander-in Chief of the Army.

The people told us that the town had been divided in two, one part under the Germans, and the other under the Bulgarians, and that the two did not get on at all well. The Germans, they said, ruled very strictly, but fairly, and the people had to appeal to them for protection from the Bulgars.

Everyone gave us "peshkirs," a sort of small towel made of thin, hand-woven stuff, and beautifully embroidered. These always form a great feature at weddings, tied round the arm, or across the chest, and floating from the horses' bridles.

When the colonel and I rode away from his house upon the following afternoon, with wreaths of flowers round our necks, our horses all decorated with these bright flowing "peshkirs," all the family waving farewell from the doorstep, and everyone in the streets wishing us good luck, he laughingly said we looked more like a bridal couple starting on honeymoon than a colonel and his sergeant riding back to camp.

## CHAPTER X

### NURSING AGAIN

Dangers of too much washing—The only spy I ever caught—Our triumphal march through the Serbian villages—Spanish flu strikes the Army—I turn into a temporary nurse.

The Germans and Austrians were now retreating quicker than ever, but they had got some of their batteries away and were shelling Parachin, the next town, to pieces. As a consequence, and as we marched along the main road, we met all the refugees flying from there towards Nish, carrying in their arms whatever household goods they had been able to snatch in their hurry, or wheeling babies in perambulators, with half a dozen chickens, and a kitchen chair, on top.

They looked so terror-stricken and pathetic that, as the men watched them streaming past, they muttered imprecations against the Austrians, and quickened their pace.

One fat, old chap caused great merriment as he hustled along with his arms clasped tight round an enormous feather pillow, the only thing he had thought of saving in his fright. "*He's* not going to lay his head on a stone to-night, anyhow," one of the soldiers said.

We did not enter Parachin, but halted round about



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it, the guns giving us a nasty time. About midnight we moved near to a ruined factory, where we saw a lot of our men lying dead, and heard that the Commandant of the 2nd Battalion had been killed.

At dawn my company started to dig themselves in near a bridge running over a little river.

I suppose the Britisher will pause for a last wash before crossing the Styx, in any case running water in war time was to me the Pied Piper's flute, and instead at once looking for cover I went down to the river's edge.

Promptly, bang went a gun from the battery on the hill overlooking us, and the plunging shell gave me a bath I had not expected. This was followed by half a dozen in such quick succession that I had no time to move anywhere, but just dropped down in the wet mud, under the shelter of the low bank. I lay there uncomfortably reflecting that if this went on much longer, and a shell blew me to bits, as seemed probable, no one would ever know what had become of me.

Just as I was thinking bitterly that my decetina, safely under cover, had not noticed my absence, there came a welcome lull, and Miladin crawled out from under the bridge to look for me, calling out, "Sandes, are you alive?"

"Just," I called back, trying to scrape some of the mud off my tunic.

"Well, hurry up and get under the bridge with us."

I looked at the bridge, a wooden one supported at the end by heavy beams, under which my decetina were sitting, and remarked that if a shell hit it they would all be killed by the falling débris. Miladin had never heard of Bairnsfather's character, but all the same made

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use of that classic phrase about a "better 'ole." Trust them for finding ready-made cover instead of digging into the hillside!

That bridge was shelled at intervals the whole day long without being hit, but the gunners' glasses must have been better than their aim, for they could even spot the difference in trade of those who tried to cross it. A peasant and his cart could go with perfect safety, but the moment a uniform showed itself there was a renewed burst of shelling.

Miladin had found a nice, sheltered, little cubby-hole for himself, just big enough for one, but he deserted it when I joined them, and lay down beside me. "I'm more comfortable here," he said evasively, when I asked him why he did not stay where he was. All the same I noticed he lay down on the side from which the splinters would be coming, and was shielding me with his own body.

After a while Mancha and Dragoutini, announcing that they were going to inspect the town of Parachin, made a sprint for some bushes, and crawled away through them. A couple of hours later they came back, laden with loot—bread, meat, wine and rakia—and we whiled away the day with a succession of meals, for we could not get much sleep with the expectation that the next shell would hit the bridge. This intrepid couple made two excursions, the second time getting a lot of grapes, and bringing back the news that the town had been badly shelled, and that many of the houses were in ruins.

"What on earth are you cleaning your rifle with, Mancha?" I enquired, picking up part of a very daintily embroidered lady's undergarment. "I don't

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know what it was," he said, "but it's a rifle-rag now. I found it in a house with the front blown away."

At dusk the order came to move from there, which we did, across a maize field, to the accompaniment of bursting shrapnel. We were all beginning to feel a bit dazed by the perpetual movement of the last two days and nights, the continuous shelling and the want of sleep, so that it was with a sigh of relief that Miladin, I and thirteen men found ourselves detailed off to form the farthest outpost in a wide field, where there were no shells, no officers, and nothing to worry us.

We were given orders that no one was to sleep, and that all were to sit with rifles and bombs ready. Not to fire a shot, or make the slightest sound until the enemy attacked, when we were to give the alarm. The enemy were somewhere ahead of us, in the darkness, and, as Miladin remarked, we were a fine, large force to wait the first attack; so, as may be imagined, we asked for nothing better than to keep quiet as long as the enemy would.

But it was all very well to order no sleep. We had had practically none at all for the last forty-eight hours, so Miladin and I went into consultation, and then, after posting double sentries, distributed the others handily and told them to dig themselves in, knowing full well that, as soon as they had done so, they would fall asleep. We two arranged to keep watch and watch about, one to keep walking round the sentries, seeing they were all right, and that they were relieved at proper intervals, while the other slept.

Whilst wandering round to inspect the ground I came upon a deep trench about 200 yards in front of

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a hole Miladin was still industriously digging for us both.

"Why should we dig ourselves in," I said, returning to him, "when there is a ready-made trench, a beauty, right in front of us?"

"Where?" said Miladin, much surprised.

"Come along and I'll show you," I said, very pleased at my find.

The trench, about 7 feet deep, ran along the edge of a maize field, and then at a sharp right-angle straight into a wood. Miladin said it must have been left from the Turkish war, which had raged over the same terrain. Better tactician than I, he judged it better not to move into it till dawn, as the enemy could creep through the maize stubble and be upon us in the dark, whereas to reach us in our present post they would have to cross the open, though in daylight it would be splendid cover.

He strolled along it one way to examine, and I followed along the other angle leading to the thick firwood. We had both of us laid our rifles down whilst digging, and I was just turning back to fetch mine, when, glancing down into the trench, I was startled to see two eyes glaring up at me.

There was a misty bit of moon, so that I could only just make out a dark shape and those two eyes. "They've got me at last," was my first thought, and sprang back from the edge, for I imagined it was an enemy patrol. Then I recovered my wits. I, a sergeant-major, to run like a frightened infant, and give as a reason that I had seen two eyes looking at me! Sometimes one has time to think of a lot in a very few seconds.



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Whoever it was—whether one or more, there had not been light enough to see—had not moved, so, cautiously, expecting a bomb in my face every moment, I crept back to the edge and peered down. The black shape did not make a sound, but the eyes were human right enough, and very much alive.

“Who’s there,” I challenged sharply, and a *woman’s* voice, even more scared than my own, answered, “Don’t shoot, it’s a woman and a child.”

“Well, come out of that, whoever you are,” I ordered, now feeling distinctly irritated, and, bending down, I gave her a hand and hauled out a miserable-looking peasant woman with a ragged shawl round her shoulder, and a two-year-old baby in her arms!

“What are you doing here, and why were you keeping so quiet?” I asked.

“I thought you were a German and was frightened. Aren’t you a German?” she answered, lamely.

Miladin, now hearing voices in the dead silence, came tearing up, wondering who in the world I could be talking to.

Her story was that she had been frightened away from her cottage by the bombardment, had wandered into the fields, where she had fallen into the hands of the Germans, who had kept her a prisoner all day. At nightfall she had escaped and was on her way home, *but had been frightened at the sight of us.* She also gave us the interesting information that there was a strong German patrol ensconced a few hundred yards from us, in the wood into which this trench led.

The story did not hang together very well, and Miladin and I looked at each other significantly. She was a

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miserable looking object. The sort that would sell her soul or her country for sixpence. There was no doubt in our minds that being caught by the Germans was true enough, but it seemed equally clear that she had been bribed or frightened into spying out our numbers and whereabouts.

I gave the frightened baby a couple of lumps of sugar I found in my pocket, to keep it from howling, and, after confiscating a large bottle of rakia she was hugging—probably for the purpose of making any men she met talk—sent her back to company headquarters with an escort. They would let her go when we moved on. She protested that she was not afraid to go alone, but Miladin, with a wink at me, assured her it was not safe, nor, as a matter of fact, could she have got past our sentries.

"I wonder what the next adventure will be," said Miladin, after making me feel more comfortable by telling me anyone would have felt startled at the incident.

After this episode, when I used to tease the adjutant by reminding him that the only prisoner he had ever caught was a Bulgar too sick to move, he would retaliate by saying that the only one *I* had ever caught by myself was a woman with a baby—and not even Bulgars!

My teeth had been chattering with fever that night, and I felt so ill I could scarcely crawl round. We had heard, vaguely, that a lot of men were suddenly going sick, but had been too engrossed to pay much attention to rumours. But no wonder, for Spanish flu had just struck us like the plague.

On the following morning we were ordered to rejoin

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the rest of the company, and to take up another position in the hills. "Come along, Sandes, what's the matter?" called the O.C., as he passed me whilst sitting on an upturned box by the roadside.

"I don't know, but I'm sick. I can't walk another step."

"All right," he said, "you had better go to the ambulance"; and off they all went in a hurry, leaving me sitting there, wondering how I should find it, for it might be ten miles to the rear for all I knew. Just then the adjutant of the regiment rode up. "Ambulance, pooh! What can the Ambulance do for you? The colonel's here; I'll give you a horse, and you can ride with us. We'll doctor you better than any Ambulance."

"I can't," I urged.

"Can't," he scoffed (the forbidden word). "Now just pull yourself together. We are going to ride through Parachin and Chuprija; the people will be expecting to see you, the soldiers ahead always talk about you, and they will be disappointed, so will the colonel."

"Hochesh? Nechesh? Morash" (will you? won't you? you've got to!) as the soldiers used to say. So I did

Parachin had been badly knocked about, and there were not very many people left in it, but going through Chuprija, the next small town, we were smothered with "peshkirs" and flowers, and my horse could hardly hold its head up for the wreaths round its neck. Flags were out everywhere, and the entire population in the streets.

We were amazed to see how quickly they had

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decorated all the houses with Serbian flags, for as we came in at one end of the town, our cavalry patrols were driving the last of the Austrians out of the other. They told us later that for days they had been making them—knowing we were coming—and hiding them under their mattresses. For the penalty for being caught with a Serbian flag was death.

The colonel, adjutant and I rode through at the head of part of the regiment, that part which was not out safeguarding our route, and a wonderful reception it was. All the people cheered and clasped our hands, calling us their saviours (a statement I had to remind some of them of a week later). The whole length of the main street was lined with women waiting with great jugs of wine and rakia, some of them carrying tables set with things to eat out of their houses. They filled the men up as fast as they could whilst marching through, and caught hold of the colonel's bridle, compelling us to stop while they handed us up stirrup-cups.

Just as we got to the end of the town five enemy aeroplanes came over. They did nothing to us, but went on and dropped more bombs on Parachin.

It was a wonderful experience to have been one of an army that had fought its way back into its own country, and to have seen the joy of the people in one liberated village after another, as we drove the enemy before us.

All the same I was not sorry when we got to camp that night. It had been a long hot ride, and I was beginning to feel I should not be able to stick it much further.

I slept on a bed that night—the adjutant's spare



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one—but in spite of all the overcoats he could lay his hands on, and pile over me, I still shivered. The next morning, when all had to ride off early, I lay out on the grass, and the men covered me with a tarpaulin while they pulled the tents down, for it was raining. A couple of hours later the ambulance arrived and put up their tents nearby, so I went over to it.

"Here's another," said the doctor to his assistant, "they are beginning to come thick and fast now." He told me I had Spanish flu and a high temperature, which I had guessed pretty well by this time. I was also told that I must ride back to Chuprija. "A temporary hospital is starting there, but I don't know what it will be like. The doctor is a Greek. If it's too bad get into some private house," he advised me.

It was a two hours' ride, in blinding rain, with my pack-horse man trudging alongside, back to Chuprija, where we had received such an ovation the day before. The Army is jolly enough when you are well, and when wounded you are carried about and well taken care of, but God help the soldier when he is merely sick.

The hospital, when we did get to it, was beyond anything I have ever seen. A long one-storied building in a compound, just evacuated by the Austrians, who had left it in an indescribably filthy condition. A Greek doctor, who seemed to have completely lost his head, had been pushed in, with a certain number of orderlies, and told to start an emergency hospital.

Hundreds of soldiers were lying all over the place, and on the cold, stone floors of the corridor in their wet, muddy uniforms. All down with flu, pneumonia or exhaustion, and the atmosphere was appalling.

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In a few minutes my man came back, saying that there was a house close to the hospital where the women would gladly take me in, and there I thankfully went. This was occupied by two women whose husbands had both been sent off to Bulgaria and interned like so many others. The party included their old mother, and nothing could exceed their kindness to me. They put me to bed in the best bedroom, in a clean shirt belonging to one of the husbands; my own could never have been imagined to have once been white.

All I wanted was to be let alone and allowed to sleep, but as endless visitors called I had, at last, to beg that no more might be allowed, and then astonished my hostess by sleeping with very little intermission for three days and nights.

There was a French veterinary surgeon, with our regiment, and, coming through with the horse transport a couple of days later, he heard I was in the town, so hunted me up and prescribed for me as he would have done for a horse. At any rate, that was all the doctoring I received, but it seemed to be pretty effective.

Miloje, the man in charge of my pack-horse, also found me out, and took up his quarters. When I asked him why he was not going on with the rest of the transport he replied that he had put the horse up and was going to stay and nurse me of course; he also seemed quite surprised I should imagine he would do anything else. This man was quite a character. On his own initiative he promptly transformed himself from a horse-boy into a very efficient nurse and batman; evidently having small faith that any woman would know how to look after me properly.

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After five or six days he brought me such awful tales of the way the men were dying in hospital with no one to do anything for them—many on their stretchers in the compound, because the Greek doctor would not take them in—that I crawled out of bed and went to investigate.

There I found a fearful state of things. The men still lay in their clothes, no blankets or sheets, and about 100 French soldiers, as well as Serbs, dying like flies of flu and pneumonia.

They told me the Greek doctor would take no more patients in, and was doing nothing for those who were there. I could see this for myself, for when an artilleryman staggered up, so sick he could hardly stand, he declared he could walk on to some village and ask the peasants to take him in. I took his temperature, and it stood at 104.

There was no one to advise, so I had to chance it, and, throwing discipline to the winds, told the Greek doctor I would report him personally as soon as I got to Belgrade. That cleared the air a bit. He then told me to do what I liked with the hospital, for, as for himself, he was sick and going to bed. Go to bed he did, and stayed there for two weeks, though there was no other doctor in the place. The three or four bolnichars (hospital orderlies) were good fellows, and the senior one priceless. All were willing to work, but said they had no one to give them orders, and begged me to do something. So, as Fate seemed to have landed me there, I took charge, and the responsibility and hard work soon completed my own cure.

The senior orderly told me that several townswomen

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came to the hospital, but could not be relied on. I suppose their three years under the Austrians had completely sapped their initiative; in any case it did not seem to have occurred to them to get the men into bed. Finding a lot of these women in an empty room, apparently winding bandages and pasting labels on bottles, I reminded them in indifferent Serbian that only a week ago they had pelted us with flowers, called us their "saviours," and were now letting these same men die on the ground.

So they brought in blankets, and sheets from the town, and by the following day the orderlies and I had got every man into bed.

The head orderly, who did the work of ten, rigged up a bathroom at the end of a corridor, and every man, unless dying, was stripped and tubbed, put to bed in clean pyjamas, and the whole place washed with disinfectant; otherwise we should soon have had it swarming with lice.

I then found that food was running short, so wrote out a pass, signed it with my own name, and stamped it with the hospital stamp which I found in the doctor's office, gave it to an orderly, and told him to take a waggon, go into the villages and beg, borrow or otherwise obtain food for the sick men, especially eggs. He came back next day with a waggon load of eggs, chickens, etc. There was plenty in the villages around, though little in the town, and the villagers only too willing to give when told it was for the hospital.

After this success I wrote out a pass every second or third day, and the old Inspector of Hospitals, who chanced along a couple of weeks later, said there was



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not another hospital fed like it, and he did not see what I had to grumble at.

We were fearfully short of everything, had only a few of the most elementary medicines, and so many patients that soon we had to put three into two beds. Quite a usual thing in those war hospitals.

There were about 100 French soldiers, all in one big room, but after a while I got them sorted out, and the worst cases made more comfortable in the quieter rooms. They were a tough lot and the orderlies could not handle them. French colonial troops, not blacks, but from a French Battalion which had been serving in Algeria, where all the "hard cases" were sent. Poor chaps, they were clothed only in light summer tunics, and in the long hot marches had thrown away their overcoats, not realizing they would need them later on. When the rainy season came of course they were soaked through and frozen.

Nor did they possess anything like the same resistance to the flu as did the Serbs, so succumbed far more rapidly, besides demanding much more attention. The Serb is the most patient man under the sun. The French always were given the best of everything; the Serb soldiers said they had fought for Serbia and were their guests, so that if a Serb had wine because he was sick, he always handed it to the Frenchman in the next bed.

The day after I went to the hospital the head orderly came and told me that those French soldiers able to get up had broken open the store-room, were stealing the trousers of their comrades who were in bed, and selling them down the town for wine.

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They had defied him, and all the other orderlies were afraid of them. "There are some of them in there now," he said, taking me up to the door of the store-room. "You can't go in there by yourself. Let me come with you." I knew that, so far, I was an unknown quantity to the French, and as they had already succeeded in terrorizing the orderlies I had to put the fear of God into them by moral force or not at all, otherwise we should be having bloodshed next. So I told the orderly to go back, and went in alone.

Two of them slunk out, but the third, a big black-moustached artilleryman, stood his ground, and towered over me till I thought by the glint in his eye he was going to pick me up and throw me out neck-and-crop after them. He was not a bad sort really, though, and must have had some spark of chivalry somewhere deep down in him, for, in spite of the telling off I gave him, he dropped the things and meekly walked out.

They had broken the lock, so, as something drastic had to be done, I put an armed sentry before the door, with orders to shoot the first man who tried to get past him.

A doctor we had to have from somewhere, so I went off to the French Battalion Headquarters and asked to see the commandant. He received me very politely, though I think he must have wondered who this unusual sergeant was. I explained the situation, and he promised that their doctor would come every day. At the same time I told him about the sentry business, and said I hoped there would be no accident. I had no authority to do as I had done, much less to French soldiers, but that order must be kept somehow, or we should be

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having pandemonium very soon. He was awfully nice, said I had done perfectly right, and that I must not be so worried about it, as those Colonial troops were the hardest to manage in the whole army. "Their own officers can't do it," he added.

That settled, I went back to the French room and "read the riot Act" there. Fortunately I could speak French fairly fluently, but such home-sick, tired-out youngsters some of them looked, with everyone against them, and their hand against every man. They all stood up, however, and listened quietly, so that my heart softened and I wound up by telling them that we were doing everything we could for them, but also of the difficulties we were working under, and that if they wanted anything they were to come straight to me, when I would do what I could to help them. From that day they never gave any more trouble.

The next day I took the sentry away, but had so many things to think of that I had completely forgotten to arrange for his relief. So, twenty-four hours later, I found him still on the same spot.

As I have said, the Serbs are the most patient people possible; being kept waiting never ruffles them, and they cannot understand why we get so exasperated when having to do so.

One of the results of making friends with these French soldiers was that they would waylay me all over the place to tell me their troubles, and the orderlies were perpetually calling me to come and soothe those who would get out of bed, often in delirium.

A nice little French doctor came every morning to attend the worst cases, and one afternoon, as he was

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passing through a ward in a great hurry, an old "Cheecha," whose only malady was pure exhaustion and the remedy a few days' rest, sat up in bed, pulled off his shirt, and prepared himself for a thorough examination. When he saw the doctor pass him by he burst into tears.

"What's the matter with him?" asked the doctor. "I examined him this morning."

"There's nothing actually the matter with him," I said, "but he thinks he's being overlooked."

The good-hearted little doctor smiled. "Well, I'm in a desperate hurry," he said, "but if it will give the poor old chap any pleasure——" and, going over to the neglected Cheecha, he gave him a thorough overhaul; pummelled him all over, listened at his chest, then told him to just stay quietly in bed, and left him radiant with importance.

I still lived with the same people, but occasionally went up again to the hospital after supper and took night-duty to give the head bolnichar a decent night's sleep, as, unless I was there, he used to tell the other two bolnichars to call him if anyone was dying.

The first day I went to hospital I discovered my old friend, Sergeant Milosh, there, with a slight attack of flu. "Good-bye, Sandes, I'm dying," he said, quite seriously. It was no time for sympathy, for if a Serb, when sick, makes up his mind he is going to die he'll as likely as not turn his face to the wall and do it. "Rubbish," I said, "you're no more going to die than I am. I'm going to bring you some of my own special medicine that cured me (the Vet's mixture!), also, to-morrow, you are to walk once round the room, and the next day twice."



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"I can't stand," he protested indignantly.

"You'll do as I tell you," I said.

Sure enough, three days afterwards, Milosh appeared, clothed and in his right mind, to pay me a visit in my room.

"Hullo, Milosh, I thought you were dying."

"I thought I was, too, and it was the last straw to have *you* so nasty to me," he grinned, "but when I struggled out of bed, as you ordered, I found I wasn't so bad after all."

During these terse days I had telegraphed twice to the Chief of Staff for a doctor; as the French battalion might be moved any day, but as I received no reply at all I just carried on. I was still in solitary charge there on the night of the 11th November, but there were no festivities, and it was not, in consequence, much of an Armistice night. But, by this time, the worst was over, most of the patients convalescent, and the "show" running smoothly.

I had not the slightest idea where my regiment had got to, but presumed it must be in Belgrade by this time. Anyway, I wanted to get back; my place was there, and not in hospital. The Greek doctor also showed some signs of getting up again and I thought, perhaps, that if he heard I had gone he would make a complete recovery, so when I met Admiral Troubridge's chauffeur driving his second car empty up to Belgrade I asked him to take me with him, for the railway-line was all torn up, and there was no other way.

By this time the hospital was half empty, all the French had left, and a Serbian medical student, who used to do rounds with the doctor and give out medicines,

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met the lesser emergency ; whilst the head orderly, whom I met again months afterwards, told me that the Greek doctor got up again, but that the patients were never again fed in the same way.

We got up to Belgrade late that night, and I found Admiral Troubridge at the Hotel Paris, where he got me a room.

## CHAPTER XI

### PROMOTION

An unexpected reception—Triumphal Entry into the new Territory—A visit to the cinema—Our Canteens in Belgrade—Travelling in uniform—Being made an Officer—A big Parade—Work in the Regiment

“ We all thought you were lost till I got your telegram from Chuprija,” said Colonel B——, the Chief of Staff, when I went to him on the following day to ask the whereabouts of my regiment. “ I sent messages and telegrams all over the place about you.”

“ I sent you two telegrams asking for a doctor,” I said.

“ Yes, I got them,” he replied calmly, “ but I hadn’t got a doctor handy, and I knew, if you were there, you would get out of the mess somehow.”

“ Well, thanks to the French, we did,” I said, “ but I did a lot of things on my own responsibility I had no authority for.”

“ It was only by everyone shouldering responsibilities that we reached Nish in twenty-five days,” he reminded me.

Once before, among the mountains, miles from anywhere, a soldier, sent by the Chief of Staff, had sprung up from beside the track and handed me a letter, just

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as though he were a postman doing his usual round. When I asked Colonel B—— afterwards how he knew I should be at that exact spot at that moment, he replied by asking what I thought he was Chief of Staff for, and added that he knew every place I went to and everything I did, so I had better look out.

The 2nd Regiment had crossed the Danube the day before, and was now on its way to Batchka and the Banat—the territory which had belonged to Hungary, was principally populated by Serbs, and was now ours.

The bridges over the Danube had been blown up, and there were no steamers running yet, but the Chief of Staff said he would lend me a carriage, and then a motor-boat to cross to Panchevo, that I might catch up my regiment.

"It won't take long to get to Panchevo," he said, "but you can't start for two hours." I wondered why, but, of course, could not ask. When I got to Panchevo I found out.

When the motor-boat neared the landing stage I saw what looked like half the town collected there, with bouquets of flowers, a lot of carriages and a band. "Who are they expecting?" I asked an officer who had come across on the same boat.

"*You*," he said, laughing. "They were disappointed at not seeing you with the regiment, so Colonel B—— played a trick on you by telephoning that you were coming. That's why he kept you back for two hours."

I was aghast, for the army had become so much my ordinary life that I had ceased to imagine that, to other people, an Englishwoman marching with the Serbs was anything out of the common. Right to the end of my



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seven years' service with the army, and every time it happened this publicity was a fresh and disconcerting surprise.

"Stick by me," I implored the officer. "I can't have a demonstration all to myself."

"All right," he answered encouragingly, and at the same time hugely enjoying the joke, "I'll stick by you."

When we landed the mayor of the town came forward and made a speech, presented me with a huge bouquet, and the women with a beautifully embroidered "peshkir." Then the mayor and I got into a carriage, all decorated with flowers and peshkirs, and drove, with all the other carriages following in procession, to the Town Hall, where there were refreshments and much speechifying.

In the end I was stood on a table to answer them. To make a speech in Serbian to all those people! All I could do was to thank them from my heart, and say the mayor would say all I should like to if I could. The mayor readily acquiesced. There is nothing the Serbs love so much as making speeches, and he made a long one.

After it was all over a Miss M—— took me to her home, where I stayed the night. She was an accomplished musician, spoke English and four other languages perfectly, and lived with her mother and two sweet, old uncles, who owned large vineyards and produced all their best wine and choicest grapes for the jolly party of friends who came for the afternoon and evening.

Next year, when stationed in Belgrade, I often used to get leave to go over to Panchievo for a Sunday's quail shooting, and stay with this Miss M——.

I soon found out where the regiment had gone, and

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caught it up at Kinkinda, where a Ladies' Society presented me with another lovely peshkir, which they had sat up all night working upon.

From here we went on to Betchkerek by train, men and all. We had finished with marching.

I shall never forget our triumphal entry into Betchkerek, with the commandant of the Brigade, who formally took over the town. I do not know the exact proportions, but I believe over two-thirds of the inhabitants were Serbs, and the rest Hungarians.

At the station, crowds of people were waiting for our train, with strings of pair-horse carriages, all decorated, and hundreds of riding horses, besides carts and waggons for the men.

With the Commandant of Brigade in the first carriage, all the officers and townspeople in the others, and the soldiers following in carts, we processed from the station to the town. Monsieur B——, the French vet., and I were put into one carriage, the only representatives of our respective countries. We were both of us amused at the situation we found ourselves in, but felt ludicrously inadequate to our rôle for such a formal and important occasion.

All the youth of the town was on horseback, hundreds of them, mostly on beautiful, spirited animals. They ranged themselves alongside as outriders, and we galloped along, every one firing rifles and revolvers into the air. It was a lovely, sunny day, and the streets were lined with people, who cheered and pelted us with flowers till the carriages were full of them. Where they got so many from in November I do not know.

In the Hungarian quarter of the town there were

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crowds too, but they watched the gay procession in silence.

When we arrived at the Town Hall the Hungarian Mayor of the Town and all the other representatives received the Commandant of Brigade, and made endless, pretty speeches. Everything went off smoothly, excepting one little, untoward incident. Monsieur B——, bored with the speeches, had gone out on the balcony, and there noticed that the only flag being flown from the Town Hall in honour of the new Serbian commandant was the Hungarian one. It might have been an oversight, but, anyway, it offended Monsieur B——'s sense of fitness, and he told me he was going to take it down if no one else would. Of course I egged him on.

A dense crowd waited outside, and the Hungarians among them did not like the change. Also I believe, a shot was fired, but things were amicably settled afterwards by the commandant, who was anxious not to hurt anybody's feelings, and eventually a Serbian and a Hungarian flag flew side by side.

On the evening of our arrival they gave us a big banquet, the first of a whole series, and Monsieur B—— and I got quite used to having our names mentioned, and began quite to fancy ourselves as representatives of our respective countries. The civilians turned out in full evening dress, but none of us, excepting one or two of the higher command, had anything but our war-stained uniforms, and Monsieur B—— used to come round to my room and say, "Let's go out and buy a clean collar for the party to-night."

My boy had started from Chuprija with his pack-horse at the same time that I had left by car, but it was about three weeks before he turned up, so that I had

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nothing except the uniform I stood up in, and very much the worse for wear. My hostess, however, gave me some of her husband's underwear, which fitted me well enough.

She was a Serb, but he a Hungarian officer, and posted as missing.

There were a lot of wealthy Serbian families there, and these could not do enough for us. They organized shooting parties, drives, and entertainments of all description. I was very much struck by their hospitality and their manners. Invited to dinner one bitter, snowy night, at a house some little distance away, I found my host himself waiting for me on the box of his phaeton, instead of his coachman, as he said he would not think of sending a servant to fetch a guest.

Although perfect order reigned in the town, and no Hungarians ever made the slightest hostile demonstration, Monsieur B—— and I had an armed soldier following at our heels, wherever we went. The colonel of the regiment had become anxious about us, as; being the only foreign representatives—especially after the flag episode—he was afraid someone might take it into his head to stick a knife into one of us when returning from one of these banquets late at night, for the streets were very badly lighted. So, for some time, wherever it was, private house or officers' mess, and after sundown, there would be our two Guardian Angels waiting, bayonet on rifle, to shadow us to our respective quarters; or if we turned into a café to watch over us from a table near the door. Mine, a very tall, wild-looking young devil, always itching for a row, acted as my batman also, and, when not with me, used to sit in the kitchen of the house in which I was quartered, and frighten the



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maidservant into fits—by his appearance I presume.

I tried to get rid of him once, as his presence seemed ridiculous, and unnecessary, but he said the colonel had himself picked him out—which he was very proud of—and told him that his head would answer for mine.

We were there for about a month, with most of the officers quartered in private houses, but with their own mess. When we left the regiment was split up. My company went to a small place right on the frontier—or what we then thought was going to be the frontier—Novi Scegedin, and I went with it. Our O.C. had just been changed again. We never seemed to have the luck of other companies, who had the same one for years.

This new captain said, "Thank goodness," when I turned up. His life had been pestered out of him by First Army Headquarters when I was missing, and, as he had taken over the Company after it had left Chuprija, he knew nothing about me, whilst all he could find out was that I had been left sick by the roadside.

We were now quartered in a village, Stari Scegedin, and across the river lay Novi Scegedin, which was purely Hungarian, and officers and men were strictly forbidden to cross the bridge in consequence.

We were not very comfortable with quarters in an empty Hungarian schoolhouse; had not much to do, so, of course, got into mischief. Our captain we knew crossed the bridge into the forbidden town every night; so, when one of our own pals was sentry, our small party of non-coms. thought we would do the same, and visit a cinema. We had primed the man on night duty that he might not lose his head should the captain chance into our sleeping quarters.,



(Upper) ENTRANCE GATE, GRAD FORTRESS, YUGOSLAVIA.  
 (Lower) RAMPARTS, GRAD FORTRESS, SURVEILLING THE RIVERS  
 DANUBE AND SAVA, SHOWING EFFECTS OF AUSTRIAN  
 BOMBARDMENT.

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All went well till, halfway back across the bridge, the captain, also returning, overtook us. He hauled me well over the coals next morning, saying that I was leading the others into mischief, though one culprit at least was my senior, and none of them such innocent lambs that they could not fend for themselves without my assistance. He wanted to punish us all, but did not quite know how to manage it. The Commandant of Battalion was only in the next village, and should he happen to come over, as he sometimes did, and find half the non-coms. in "Zatvor" (guard-room) he would certainly enquire how our company officer had caught us on the bridge, when our troubles would be nothing to his own.

I spent Christmas Day there—the English Christmas, the Serbian one being thirteen days later—and felt so home-sick that on Christmas Eve I sent a note to the Commandant of Battalion, telling him I had no way of celebrating Christmas. So back came a large goose and some wine. All the non-coms. and corporals were then invited to a Christmas dinner, and we spent the afternoon in making speeches and drinking healths. When I thanked the major later, and told him I had had a non-coms. party, he said he knew what I would be up to when he sent it.

I wanted very much to see the cutting of the Yule Log in Belgrade on Banja Dan, the Serbian Christmas Eve, for the first time since Christmas 1913, so, as we had been ordered back there, I obtained leave to go two days earlier. I missed it, though, for the train broke down.

There were four or five other soldiers on the train,

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also going home on Christmas leave, so we persuaded the stationmaster to give us a hand-trolley to continue our journey along the line. But after battling against a gale for a couple of hours we had to pull up near a Hungarian village, where they invited us to be guests at a wedding which was taking place.

I found Belgrade a dismal-looking place on this Serbian Christmas Eve. A good deal of the outward damage had been repaired, but there were hardly any shops open, and only two or three hotels. The Austrians and Germans seemed to have taken everything they could lay their hands on.

I finally located the rest of the regiment in a filthily dirty, and perfectly empty, barracks, which had been used by the Austrians. On the following day I found a room in the town.

As soon as Miss Simmonds, that splendid organizer, turned up we got hold of an empty building, which we cleaned up, and, by dint of a good deal of scrounging, started our free canteens again there. Hundreds of men who had been prisoners in Austria were coming back in a pitiable condition, but we were able to give them tea and cigarettes, underclothes and soup, the Serbian Government also helping with supplies.

It now turned bitterly cold, so we had good fires always going in two stoves. We also managed to get benches and tressle-tables, and any soldier could come in and have a mug of hot tea, sit there and play games as long as he liked.

When the 2nd Regiment moved into the Gorni Grad, the old fortress, and used it as a barracks, we started another canteen there, if only to give the men a mug of



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hot tea and a cigarette before going on duty at 6 a.m., as, in those days, breakfast was unknown in the army, and consequently they would get nothing till midday.

They used to line up by companies and file through. I had three men helping me there, and we supplied the mugs, which they used to collect as fast as they were emptied. One day my helpers told me we were several mugs short, as some of the men, having drunk their tea, absent-mindedly put the mugs in their pockets. We should soon have had none at this rate, so I had to announce that the next time this happened we should have to shut down till the missing mugs were found. Two days later the missing mugs mysteriously reappeared, sitting all by themselves in the middle of the parade ground.

Later on all the Salonique Front men were demobilized in batches, and as they had no underclothes to take home we fitted them out, and Miss MacGlade, who was again running our canteen in the town, had a busy time handing out a bundle to each man on presentation of his demobilization paper.

Some time in April the colonel said he thought I ought to take a trip through Jugoslavia, to see some of the Serbian territory liberated from the Austrians. I was nothing loth, so he gave me six weeks' leave, with free passes over all the railways and steamers. It was a great trip—Sarajevo, Zagreb, and all over the Dalmatian coast and Montenegro. I was passed on with introductions from one officers' mess to another, and they laid themselves out to give me a good time.

Montenegro was particularly interesting; some of its quaint, national customs being more in evidence

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than usual. In Cettingje I went to a ball, where the decorations consisted principally of loaded rifles. Every man and boy came in picturesque, national costume, and armed to the teeth.

On this trip I looked for no adventures, but I find that if there is one within a hundred miles it comes straight for me. Anyway, I got back from that six weeks' trip feeling that whatever else Life might be, it was never dull. I had chased Montenegrin brigands with a lorry; helped pacify a village in revolt; had come down in a seaplane, which was left a total wreck in Lake Scutari, whilst a French destroyer and a company of Serbs patrolled sea and land looking for us; had been shut up, in Fiume, for half a day by the Italians, because I was a Serbian sergeant, and until rescued by an English captain.

At the end of April, 1919, the "Ukase," or list, of promotions came out. In peace time an officer has to pass through the Military Academy, but during, and immediately after, the War, and owing to the shortage of officers, all the sergeant-majors who had been decorated were made 2nd lieutenants. My name was not among them.

I had never expected it to be, but all my military friends were much concerned, urging me to write an "Act" and send it through the regulation channels to G.H.Q. Thus advised I thought I had better go and talk it over with the battalion commandant. Army regulations are cut and dried. There had never been a woman officer in the Serbian Army. The contingency never had arisen; consequently, there was no provision made for or against it.

## PROMOTION

There had been a lot of changes and promotions after the Armistice. We alone had a new colonel, and the 1st and 3rd Battalions had new commandants. Beli Markovitch, our new commandant, I had known before he joined our regiment, and we had always been good friends. Accordingly, as everything had to be done strictly according to regulations, and not just talked over casually, I formally applied to my O.C. for permission to interview my superior officer.

I found him in the battalion office, and, standing at attention, voiced my grievance that comrades had been promoted whilst I had been passed over, and winding up by saying that either I was a soldier or was not. If I was, why had a distinction been made; if not, then why not demobilize me and let me go home? I reminded him that I had had nearly four years in the army and was fed up with it anyhow. (As a matter of fact, I never loved anything so much in my life.)

Beli Markovitch looked torn between a desire to chaff me and sympathy with my obvious seriousness.

"An ultimatum, eh! Sit down a minute, Sandes, and cool off," he suggested, offering me a cigarette, "and let's see what we can do."

He studied a book of Army Regulations for a few minutes, whilst I "cooled off," and discovered that it was not down in black and white that a woman could not be promoted to commissioned rank, so that was one thing in my favour.

"Now," he said, "your company has changed hands several times; tell me the names of all the O.Cs. you have served under, as any still alive will have to write their report on you, and it may take time. I will write

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my own report and opinion of the matter, and have it O.K'd. by the colonel, who will forward it, with his own opinion, to the Commandant Division, who sends it to someone else, and, in due course, it will reach G.H.Q., provided it is not turned down by anyone during its progress, and you get no adverse report. If no one disagrees, all your reports are good, and Prince Alexander (then Prince Regent for King Peter, who was getting very old and feeble) will append his signature, we may possibly have a woman officer in the Serbian Army yet."

The report successfully ran the gauntlet, but, even after reaching G.H.Q., had to go beyond, for a special Act of Parliament had to be passed to enable a commission being given me.

Prince Alexander knew about me, but before he would sign such an innovation he came himself, one day, to the regiment, and made searching enquiries among the officers as to my character. Whether they were unanimous in wanting me to be made one of them I do not know, but they stood by me to a man.

Prince Alexander signed it, and three days before it came out in the Army Gazette, ante-dated two months to make it of the same service as the others, the Minister of War himself, General Yankovitch, sent for me to the War Office, and, wringing me warmly by the hand, congratulated me, and told me to don my epaulettes.

We were given an allowance for new uniform, but as it barely covered the cost of a sword, and not liking to count my chickens before they were hatched, I had not yet got my officer's kit. We had to go down town that night, though, to "wet" my jacket, so several



## PROMOTION

of the other lieutenants rigged me out between them. One had to turn out exactly "so," spick and span, and one would have thought I was a *débutante*, being dressed for her first ball, to judge by the fuss they made about it.

"Here, M—— has just bought a new tunic, and he is just about your build"; so a batman was sent off at a run to find M——, who duly appeared, and stripped off his new tunic. Another produced new epaulettes and a cap; and another, who could not join us himself, lent his sword. As no one had parade kit at that time my own sergeant's breeches and leggings did, and we sallied down town to make a night of it.

Like most Continental towns, everyone strolls up and down the main street from six to eight every evening. The "Terrazia," the main street in Belgrade, used to be packed with officers, cadets, non-coms., ladies with their husbands, townsmen, and groups of flappers parading up and down, and before one had got the length of it one's arm ached with exchanging salutes.

The newly promoted 2nd lieutenants soon found, however, that being an officer in peace time meant a good deal more than clanking along the Corso in shiny top-boots with spurs, and "giving the girls a treat." Not only was there a very much heavier responsibility than when a care-free non-com., but much more arduous work. One of them confided to me that he used to think officers had a soft job, but he now wished he were a non-com. again.

Every day, except Sunday, from April to October, reveille sounded at 4 a.m., and your batman brought you a glass of tea without milk, or a little cup of Turkish

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coffee, and, whether you liked it or not, saw to it that you were turned out on parade properly dressed, and sufficiently awake at a quarter to five. An hour's march through the town to Topchider, where there was a wide grassy expanse on which the whole regiment drilled till a little after ten, interspersed with short rests of ten minutes each; then the return march to barracks at the hottest portion of the hot, Balkan summer's day—all on an empty stomach. Then a wash, a brush down, and to the officers' mess for dinner at twelve or soon after, following which everyone, officers and men, turned in for a short sleep.

Later in the summer, instead of drill, and on two days in the week, we had "Ratna Sluzba," a sort of small manoeuvres, 1st Company against 2nd Company; then later, battalion against battalion, and so on up to the massed operations.

These mimic battles used to take practically the whole day; tramping over fields and ditches, and crawling through high fields of maize (where, if you did not keep a sharp eye on them, half your vod would creep away and sleep), and getting back to barracks, sometimes after three o'clock in the afternoon, dead to the world.

On days other than Ratna Sluzba the bugle went again at two-thirty, which meant that from 3 to 6 p.m., more drill, but of a lighter and more theoretical sort: after which the men assembled on the parade ground for evening prayer, and the day's work was over. The officers were then free to go where they liked, within the confines of the town, unless orderly officer for the day, or in charge of a patrol.

## PROMOTION

I had been transferred, on promotion, to the 2nd Company of the 3rd Battalion, and this company possessing only three vodniks, including myself, it came to my turn to visit the sentries from nine till twelve every third night. Some of the pickets were quite a long way outside the town, so that it made a long day, but one had to be up at 4 a.m. next morning just the same. A vodnik is not entitled to a horse, the captain alone rides. The vodnik marches alongside his men; but, provided I could borrow a horse for myself, and another for the private, I was allowed to ride on sentry patrol in the summer. In the winter I could go at any hour of the night I liked, after 9 p.m., taking three men with me, but had to walk.

It seemed that everyone in the town knew of my promotion, for I had so many congratulations that it was only the really hard work we did behind the scenes that kept my head from being turned.

Vidovdan, one of the big Serbian fête days, occurred a few days after I had received my commission, and there was a big military parade in which every unit stationed in Belgrade took part. We were to march through the town with bands playing and colours flying, and Prince Alexander was to take the salute. It was my first appearance in public with the rest of the company, and as it was a big, formal parade, my company officer cautioned me that, no matter what anyone did, I must keep quite serious, and not answer any salutes. In the Serbian Army the captain rides on the left side of his company, and his vodniks march on the right, alongside their respective vods.

This was the biggest fête day of the summer, and the

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streets were lined with people. All the windows along the line-of-route crowded to watch the march past—the first since the war. It was well, therefore, that the captain had warned me, for I was quite unprepared for what followed. My promotion had got into the papers, so that everyone who recognized me shouted, “Bravo Sandes!” whilst one windowful of girls pelted me with roses. I had hard work to keep a straight face, and not reply to their chaff, whilst my laughing captain saluted them on my behalf.



## CHAPTER XII

### LIFE AS A LIEUTENANT

A Vodnik's life—The Black Sheep of the Company—On Patrol—The Officers' Ball—A jolly send-off by the Regiment—Transferred to the Granichna Troops—Russian soldiers—A Civilian again.

A Serbian vodnik has to drill the men himself; nothing is left to the sergeant excepting to line up the vod and turn it over to his officer. "Carry-on, Sergeant," was "nah-poo" for us.

There are about fifty or sixty men in a full vod, and the vodnik is expected to know every man personally, also his family history and peculiarities. He deals out minor punishments, or, for anything serious, sends the man up to the captain. His men come straight to him for everything, without any intermediary in the shape of a non-com. The vodnik is responsible for well-being and behaviour, and, in short, to his own vod he is a regular, little, tin god.

For the first few weeks we newly promoted officers lived in mortal terror of doing something wrong, and especially of making some mistake in front of one of our superior officers.

Of course, I made mistakes at first; we all did, but

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the others had had two months start of me. Both junior officers and recruits are let down gently for the first two or three weeks, but, whereas nobody was particularly interested in what the other vodniks might do, excepting their own O.C.s, every single officer who happened to be passing would stop to see how I got on. Woe betide me if I made a slip at morning drill, for directly I showed my face in the mess-room for dinner I would be greeted by a perfect hail of good-natured chaff.

One morning my company officer rode up to where I was drilling my vod to receive my report. I gave the word of command to "salute to the right," whereas he was coming up on my own right, but on the men's left. Directly the words were out of my mouth I knew my mistake, but the men were game, and, without moving a muscle of their faces, saluted to the left. The O.C. said nothing, he had only seen that the salute was right, and had missed my order. After I had reported he watched us for a few minutes, and then rode on.

Unluckily for me, however, another officer passing had spotted the slip, and I was ragged for several days. The captain was awfully decent, though, for he told them to watch their own vodniks a little more and leave his alone.

My job was of course extra hard on account of the language, for, though I could talk it fairly fluently, I had to learn so many words of command, and the exact tone in which to give them. For the first week I was given a sergeant-major to help me with the drill, but after that I had to carry on alone.

The Grad, or Fortress, inside which the regiment

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was stationed, is a huge old place standing on a promontory at the end of the town, facing the junction of the Danube and Sava rivers. It was, I believe, built in Roman times. Only the thick walls and massive gateways were left, and they were badly battered by the Austrian guns across the river, and at the opening of hostilities. It had long been used as a barracks, but in 1919 there were hardly any inside buildings left standing; only temporary ones of wood for the men, and some brick remains. In summer it was a nice place, cooler than the town, with winding paths and several groves of trees; but in winter a deep sea of mud, and with the winds blowing straight across the river from the vast plains of Hungary one was nearly cut in two.

In the spring of 1919, when we first took up our quarters here, the town was still suffering from the effects of the occupation. Rooms were hard to get and very expensive, and, as nothing special was provided for us, the unmarried officers fixed themselves up as best they could inside the Grad. We had been campaigning for a good many years, were accustomed to living simply, and our wants were few.

Captain S—— of another company, the doctor and myself, solved our housing problem by unearthing our tents again, and pitching them in a little grove of trees just off the parade ground. We were presently joined by a couple more, and, together with the little bivouac tents of our batmen, we made a sizeable encampment to ourselves.

There we lived all the summer, surrounded by a small menagerie consisting of a mongrel black-and-white pup—who had selected my bed as a good place to

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sleep on, and refused to go away again—whom I called “Whiskey,” a good-sized pet lamb, presented to me by some peasants—which had travelled all the way from the centre of Serbia, sitting between myself and the driver on the front seat of a Ford—and a very large and vicious rabbit owned by the captain. This rabbit was a perfect terror.

Besides all the new recruits called up in the spring we had a lot of Serbs from the other side of the Danube, who had served in the Austrian Army. Those in my company were all drafted into one vod, together with any of the old Salonique Front men not yet demobilized, and handed over to me; about sixty in all.

They knew the Austrian drill, but not the Serbian, and at first some spoke more German and Hungarian than Serbian. They were all old soldiers, fed up with war, and rather resentful of the strict discipline of peace-time. Nor were they so smart to look at as the new recruits, whom they looked down on, but who were rapidly getting into shape. They were incurably lazy, but confident—especially the old Salonique Front men—that they could lick a whole regiment of recruits if it came to the point.

Up to every trick of the old soldier they might have made their unfortunate vodnik's life a burden had they felt so inclined, but they were, on the contrary, a loyal lot, for they stuck by me in everything, and I hardly ever had any trouble with them.

Only once did they play me up at drill, and then I had to punish the vod, en masse and on the spot, with extra drill; consequently we arrived back in barracks at supper time, mutually annoyed with each other.



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These peasant soldiers were just like children though, for, next morning, they crowded round, said they were sorry, and would never do it again.

Though discipline was tremendously strict, the relations between officers and men were more informal and friendly than is generally the case in an army. Formerly each regiment was recruited entirely from its own district, and the men had all known each other in their own villages from childhood, took a personal interest in each other, and many had been bound by the additional tie created by fighting side by side through three wars.

If a man was in any difficulty at all, whether to get married or not, how to treat the sick pig his wife had written him a disturbing letter about, or the best way to get out of some scrape, he went to an officer about it. Later on the military authorities mixed the different Yugoslavian elements, and there was a large influx of Serbian officers who had fought in the Austrian Army.

One fellow, Marko, who easily took the palm for being the most incorrigible scamp, the laziest man, in the company, and the captain's *bête noir*, was in my little lot. He was an old Salonique Front man, and a good soldier when fighting was about, as his comrades all vouched for, but now utterly sick of the army; and small wonder, for some of these men, after fighting for four years, had not yet seen their homes.

Whenever Marko could shirk a drill, which was about three times out of five, he would do so.

"Where's Marko, again?" I asked the sergeant one hot afternoon.

"I can't find him," he replied. "I have tried everything on earth on that man. The captain has given

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him every punishment he can think of, and he's more often in 'Zatvor' (military prison) than out of it."

I told him to find Marko, and send him to me after drill. I very seldom found it necessary to send a man up to the captain. Small misdemeanours I could cope with myself, but I was going to do it this time.

When he appeared, an unprepossessing, sullen-looking chap, I told him I had had enough of him, and that he was to go "on the mat" next day. When dismissed he saluted and turned away without a word, then hesitated and came back.

"Don't send me up to the captain, Mr. Lieutenant (as the Serbian soldier says instead of "Sir"). He's angry enough with me as it is. I'll give you my word of honour, if you will give me one more chance, I'll turn over a new leaf. I'll never shirk drill again *as long as you are vodnik*. My word of honour," he added, earnestly.

It was an unusual way of begging off punishment, but, as he did not attempt any of the usual excuses, I began to suspect there might be more in this black sheep than met the eye.

"All right, Marko," I said, after turning it over in my mind for a moment, "I'll take a soldier's word of honour." And he kept it, as he had said, as long as he was with me.

I came to the conclusion that what he suffered from was ennui and too active a brain, so set to work to remove the cause by keeping him too busy to think.

Three or four of the ex-Austrian soldiers, though willing enough, were stupid at drill and upset the others; so, every day, I told off Marko—who could do the drill to perfection when he chose—to teach them apart.

## LIFE AS A LIEUTENANT

He quickly became my right-hand man for all sorts of messages and odd jobs.

He repaid me in the end, and particularly one night when out on patrol. Three men were invariably told off for my patrol, and after a while I noticed that Marko was always one of them. Thinking the sergeant had had to give him the duty again as a punishment—it meant a three-hours' tramp, and not getting to bed till after midnight—I asked him about it. "No, I volunteer for patrol each time. To take care of you," he added casually.

One night, shortly after midnight, the four of us were returning viâ the Docks, where, if there is any trouble about, it is usually to be found. And, sure enough, we found it.

A sergeant had got drunk somewhere, had run amok, and barracks had been telephoned to for an escort. At first he had gone quietly, and, for some reason, his escort had not disarmed him. But, when we came across him, he was standing in the middle of the road, rocking-drunk, his escort in a circle round him at a loss what to do, while he was threatening each in turn with his rifle did they attempt to lay hands on him.

This little trouble was the business of the Town Patrol, not mine, but, as it was nowhere in sight, or anyone else for that matter, I thought I had better take the matter in hand. Accordingly, with all the confidence in the world I walked up to the sergeant and ordered him to hand over his rifle. But instead of doing this he pointed the barrel six inches from my chest, and held it there, as he swayed, with his finger on the trigger.

Somehow time seems to pass slowly when the business-

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end of a loaded rifle pokes one in the chest. Anyway, we stood gazing at each other, whilst I wondered whether the power of the human eye would turn out all it is cracked up to be. Neither we two, nor any of the patrol, moved; for, to have done so would have only served to precipitate the crisis.

Everyone seemed struck dumb till I heard Marko's agonized voice cry behind, "Don't shoot, sergeant. Don't shoot. It's *our Englishwoman!*" In his anxiety he had forgot the formal "Mr. Lieutenant," and, instead, had used the old name the men had given me when first I joined up, and has gone through the Retreat with them. Drunk as he was the sergeant recognized it.

"Prolazi" (pass on), he said, shouldering his rifle as if on sentry-go. "I'll go quietly." And so he did, right to barracks.

Marko told me afterwards that this sergeant was well known for his hatred of all officers, and, when fighting drunk, would certainly have shot any other who had interfered with him.

If an officer knocked up he could apply to the doctor for three, or five, days "rest," which differed from a holiday, inasmuch as he might not stay in bed or he would be deemed ill enough to be sent to hospital; nor might he go down-town, for then he would be well enough to go on duty. I had so far, though not fit, refrained from applying for it, but one morning the doctor came to my tent early and said I was the only vodnik who had not done so, and that he was going to tell the captain he ordered it, whether I liked it or not.

That summer was a jolly one, in spite of the hard work, for there was great camaraderie amongst all the



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officers. The barracks was our home, and all our interests were in common. It was that which always made the army so fascinating to me, and so different from any other kind of work. Here there was no finish to work when the clock struck, and then search to find amusements and companions elsewhere; our work and our play were all done together, and our whole life and interests revolved round the regiment. When extra duty cropped up, which necessitated dropping some pleasure, we cut it out without a thought or a regret. Army work came first, and discipline became a habit.

I soon found out that if one needed a strong constitution to keep up with the Serbs in war time it was nothing to what one had to possess to keep up with them in peace. Every evening, at six o'clock, when the day's work was done, you changed into another uniform, and, your batman having looked you over with a critical eye and wiped the last speck of dust from your boots, you sallied forth into the town, in threes or fours.

At the beginning of the month, after a stroll down the Corso, we used to have supper in a restaurant and then go to the cinema, or to the very indifferent music-hall, or else sit in one of the cafés, where generally we would be joined by others, and listen to the band while we drank our wine and coffee. Towards the end of the month funds would run low, so we contented ourselves with the bands in the cafés; but we were always a jolly company, wherever we were. The only nights we ever stayed in were on some Saturdays when officers' relatives were invited, when we had music and refreshments, and danced in the mess-room.

Luckily for me I had always been pretty good at

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sitting up late, for we hardly ever got back before midnight, despite the fact that we had to be up at 4 a.m., so that I was soon able to hold my own with any of them.

Occasionally I used to make a feeble protest, and say I was not coming, but the others always squashed it by telling me to "be a man."

However many of us there might be, there was never any argument or discussion. Someone would make a suggestion, the senior among us decided, and everyone was perfectly happy. Once out you could not break up the party; you had to sit it out, even if it lasted till reveillé.

It always seemed to me that men took life much more easily and straightforwardly than women. Things were simplified, too, by having to put one's own fads and fancies aside and conform to the popular verdict. Every morning you were told whether you were to go on duty in an overcoat or without one, regardless as to whether you fancied yourself a chilly person or the reverse. In the evening one did what one liked, which meant what the majority liked.

The Serbs are great people for sitting up all night, and, when giving a party, never think of breaking up before eight or nine on the following morning.

We did not mix very much with the civilians, but sometimes two of the captains, who had friends in the town, would make me come with them to some of these parties, which meant only getting back to barracks as reveillé was sounding, and with just time to wash and go on parade. So, at last I struck, saying that I would only go with these two on Saturday nights. It was all very well for them; they were both O.C's., could



(Upper) GROUP OF SERBIAN OFFICERS OUTSIDE LIEUT. SANDIS'S HUT,  
BEOGRAD'S FORTRESS.  
(Lower) LIEUT. SANDIS DRILLING.



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send off their companies in charge of a vodnik, and follow at their leisure on horseback, whilst I had to be on the spot, and march out alongside my vod.

In October, an order suddenly came that all tents were to come down, so again we had to hunt round for quarters. But I soon discovered the remains of a small stone hut on the ramparts, facing the Danube, with a grand view over the river and the plains beyond. There were only the four walls, but, with a little scrounging, I got the materials for the roof, floor, door and two small windows. Of course everyone jeered at my great find, because they had never thought of it themselves. But, in three days, with half-a-dozen of my men detailed off as builders, I had a very comfortable little hut in which I passed the winter. True, it was a bit small, and when the snow lay deep on the ground, and the wind swept straight across the Danube from the snowy plains, the approach was a bit chilly, but with the walls lined with bass-matting, a roaring stove going, and half-a-dozen of us sitting in there, one did not notice the outside cold. Soldiers, like sailors, get enough fresh air out of doors all day, and in all weathers, so that, when they do get inside, they generally manage a good "fug."

Visiting the sentries in winter was not as pleasant an evening promenade as it could be made in summer. And, in the autumn, when the spring recruits went on sentry-go, guarding Government haystacks, and similar duties outside the town, they were so nervous at finding themselves alone, yet so anxious to do their duty, that they were apt to let off their rifles at very slight provocation.



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One night I had to ride a little way along the railway line to where half a dozen sentries were posted, in charge of a sergeant. Just as I reached this picket I became conscious that a train was coming up behind me, also that there was no place by which to get clear of the line, excepting the spot where the sentry stood. "Stoy" (halt), called the sentry. "Patrol Officer, but I can't halt here," I shouted (one must not *shout* the password). "Halt, or I fire," replied the recruit, determined to do his duty whether the train ran over me and my horse or not. Fortunately the sergeant of the guard dashed out and saved the situation.

On New Year's Eve the usual Officers' Ball was given, and King Alexander was present. It was the first I had been to. The King always opened the ball with the "kola," the national dance, and after that he would mix with the people and talk to them, especially with those he had known on the Salonique Front.

"Why aren't you dancing, Sandes?" he asked me. I said I did not care to dance with the girls, nor probably they with me, and couldn't dance anything but the kola with the officers, being myself in uniform.

"If you won't find a partner for yourself I am going to find one for you," he laughed.

A few minutes later he went up to Doctor MacPhail, a Scotch lady doctor who had worked all the time on the Salonique Front, and still has her own Children's Hospital in Belgrade. The last visible link between Serbia and all those British women who had worked and died for her during the war.

"I've got a partner for you for the next waltz, Dr. MacPhail. It's Lieutenant Sandes. I was just going

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to leave, but I shall wait to see you two dance it."

The next dance was a long quadrille, so the King retired to the back of the raised daïs and chatted with Voyvoda Misitch, but when the next waltz struck up he came back and took his seat again in front. His aide-de-camp then beckoned to us quite seriously, and there we two had to dance close up to the daïs—I am but a very indifferent dancer at the best of times—whilst he and Voyvoda Misitch sat and smiled at the joke. At last came the signal for the National Anthem to end the first, and certainly the last, time I shall ever dance before Royalty "by command."

In March, 1920, I applied for and obtained a year's leave, and this was increased to a year and a half.

I got back to the regiment, on September 1st, 1921, just in time to take the oath of allegiance, with the rest of its officers, to King Alexander, on the death of old King Peter.

Once an officer in the Serbian Army you are always one, and go on the Permanent Reserve when demobilized. They had all to get into uniform again, therefore, and come back to their own units to take the oath.

The oath was taken up at the Grad, and it was a big ceremony. The priest stood at a table in the centre of the parade ground, with the colonel behind him, and we, the officers, formed a hollow square enclosing them. Holding up our right hands we repeated after the priest the words of the oath to defend King and Country. Afterwards each one had to write it out and seal it with his monogram under his signature. Not being a Serbian subject it was not my country, but it made no difference.

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On my return I found a great many changes among the officers. All the Reserve officers, like myself, had been demobilized, or else had gone into the Frontier Troops, but I soon picked up the old life again. Only the Regulars could be troop officers now, and as I could not be a regular without becoming a Serbian subject, and did not want to be demobilized, I was transferred to the Granichna Trupa (Frontier Troops) after my O.C. had written his report that I was "fit to be an officer in peace time or in war."

So, during the following February, I went as vodnik to the 13th Company of the Granichna troops in Dalmatia, and was stationed at Mlin, a lovely little village on the coast about six miles south of Dubrovnik (Ragusa). The headquarters of the company was at Cavtat, about the same distance on the other side, and it had a long rayon along the coast to guard, including a lot of the islands. My vod was given the section from Cavtat right away to Zemun, a headland a long way beyond Dubrovnik.

The majority of the men in the Granichna troops were Russians; for when General Wrangel's White Army was shipped away from Gallipoli part was taken to Bulgaria and part to Serbia, where all those who wished it were enrolled as "Granicharis" (Frontiersmen). The higher officers were given the rank of non-com., and I had already heard that I should have Russian colonels under me as sergeants, but had not thought very much about it.

I had not previously met any Russians, so pictured to myself getting some fat, old colonel as sergeant; probably, with a bushy beard one and was, if anything, rather

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pleased at the idea of getting some of my own back by making him take a bit of exercise.

When I actually got to Cavtat I found that the O.C. was away for a few days inspecting the 3rd Vod. The new vodnik was expected, but not even the O.C. knew whom it would be. The men took my baggage off the little steamer which had brought me from Dubrovnik, and went to fetch the sergeant, a Russian artillery colonel, who was in charge in the O.C.'s absence. Whatever shock he may have felt (he told me afterwards he was the only one who instantly spotted that I was a woman) was nothing to the one I had. Instead of the fat, grey, bearded, old "dugout" I was expecting I was confronted by a tall, clean-shaven young man, who stood at attention, and reported to me very correctly, but with a wicked and sarcastic twinkle in his eye.

Russians were an unknown quantity to me, and the little I had heard did not add much to my peace of mind. I consequently thought "Heaven help me if I am going to be held responsible for *that* sergeant's good behaviour for the next year or so." I also wondered if there were many more like him.

As vodnik I had now much more freedom, but also much more responsibility. I had to manage my men, and learn the new work, as best I could; write a full report to the O.C. once a fortnight, and see him only occasionally. I was quartered at Mlin, where I had a post of five men and another Russian sergeant—a Guards' colonel—but as I had to visit, once a week, the five other posts where I had men stationed, I was mostly on the road, or rather on the water by small steamer or rowing boat.



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The Adriatic is subject to frequent and violent storms, and the O.C., an even worse sailor than I am, said we both deserved medals.

We were supposed mostly to look out for smuggling to and from Italy, and also to stop the excellent tobacco brought in over the mountains from Hertzegovina, without having paid duty. Tobacco being a Government monopoly—all the best was exported, something to do with war debts I believe—the consequence was that half the population smoked the good, smuggled weed.

The coast-line is so indented, and there are so many islands, that it would really have taken a small army to patrol the length of coast-line each single company had to look after, and, the fishing population being solidly against us, it was like a blind kitten being put into a haystack full of rats, and being expected to distinguish itself.

Smuggling there undoubtedly was, though not to any great extent, but, in respect of the tobacco, and short of searching every old peasant-woman who came to market with a couple of pounds of tobacco under her cloak, or tied round her waist under the nine or more petticoats she wore, it was impossible to catch any-one.

I, being a new broom and full of enthusiasm, thought, of course, that it would be fine to catch a real smuggler off one's own bat, and for over a week sat, every night, on the cliffs, with one of my Russian soldiers. With civilian overcoats buttoned over our uniforms, and wearing disreputable-looking caps, we lay concealed half way down the cliff, just over the spot where a

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boat was supposed to land contraband, but never got the sniff of a smuggler's hair or hide.

After that I gave it up, and abandoned myself to the more prosaic duties of visiting each post; seeing that the sergeant in charge was sending the men on patrol frequently enough, and that they were keeping themselves and their rifles clean. The company had only lately come there, and, being short of a vodnik, the 2nd Vod had got slack, but as they never knew upon which day I should turn up they soon bucked up.

Here, at first, I was very lonely. I had come straight from a regiment where everyone was good to me, and now I could feel that the Russians (80 per cent. of the Company) distrusted the innovation. Some of the men, both Serbs and Russians, were a bit of a handful, and my sergeants, the Russian ex-officers, were holding aloof and watching me critically, or so it seemed to me. However, in a few weeks, we all shook down and became very good friends. Soon I could depend thoroughly on my sergeants, who began to back me up loyally, and this despite the fact that it must have gone bitterly against the grain. For in one case, a Russian—an officer in the Czar's army before the Revolution, who had more at the end of his little finger concerning military matters than I could ever have learnt in a life-time—has to salute a lieutenant and take orders from him, or worse still *her*. Nevertheless, they were all three of them absolutely correct in their attitude as non-coms., and, at the same time, always ready with their help and advice. It was, also, entirely due to their co-operation

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that the captain said ours was the only vod he never had any trouble with.

They were a rackets company, but they had gone through frightful experiences in their war against the Bolsheviks. They were torn with anxiety about their families left behind in Russia, and were, besides, badly equipped and badly fed. Money was given in lieu of rations, so that it was no wonder they sometimes tried to forget their troubles.

Among other wild rumours always floating round in the army we heard, towards the end of the summer, that volunteers were going to be called for to form special companies for guarding the Albanian and Bulgarian frontiers against Komitadjes (irregular bands of Brigands) and we were awfully keen about it. One of my "Sergeant-Colonels," and very popular with the men, said that a lot of them were willing to volunteer, but only on condition that I went as O.C. with him as my second-in-command.

We soon had it all planned out. We would have a hand-picked company of devils, Russians and Serbs mixed, and I was to get hold of some of the old Salonique Front men who had been with me in the war, and whom I was sure would join. I was then to go to Belgrade, see the Minister of War, and say I would present him with a whole, ready-made company, and that all he needed to provide were arms and ammunition. We would provide our own rations and everything else. It would have been some company I fancy, but, unfortunately, our schemes were knocked on the head by an order from the Russian Command that no Russians were to volunteer for other than the regular Granichna troops.



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During the last week in October it was confirmed that the Granichna troops in Dalmatia were to be demobilized, and my company was ordered to come in from all its various posts, and assemble at Headquarters at Cavtat. I went there on the day ordered, and found that the O.C. had gone away on routine duty, and had left me in charge of the whole lot.

A nice time I expected to have. The men had all been stuck away in small groups, in those outlying posts, for ten months, and were delighted to meet one another again, and bent on having a *finale furioso*. So, for the first twenty-four hours, I used the "blind eye," which is, occasionally, a necessary part of an officer's equipment, and, on the whole, they were reasonable.

The captain had rooms in Cavtat, in the same building in which the men were quartered, and his wife always kept one for me whenever I liked to stay. It was here, on the second evening of my arrival, that I nearly fell over my little batman, Ivan. I was fond of Ivan, who had come to me with the worst of characters, but turned out to be a splendid, little chap.

He was sitting, crouched on the bottom step of a long stone flight, and the light was dim.

"What are you doing down here, Ivan?" I said. "Get to bed at once."

"I can't, Mr. Lieutenant," he replied, without moving.

"What do you mean? You *can't*! Are you too drunk to stand?" I said sternly.

"No, Mr. Lieutenant, I am drunk, but not too drunk to stand. But," he added simply, "I haven't got any trousers on. You go up first and I'll follow at once."



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I turned hastily and did as my batman bid me, before losing my dignity in laughter.

On October 31st, 1922, we all received our demobilization papers. Seven years, almost to the day, since I had first joined the army as a private. Some of us became civvies, some joined the Customs, and all scattered in different directions, as sorry to part as we had been at first to meet.

I cannot attempt to describe what it now felt like, trying to get accustomed to a woman's life and a woman's clothes again; and also to ordinary society after having lived entirely with men for so many years.

Turning from a woman into a private soldier proved nothing compared with turning back again from soldier to ordinary woman. It was like losing everything at one fell swoop, and trying to find bearings again in another life and an entirely different world.

For a long time, when walking down the street, I had to clench my hand to keep from saluting mechanically, and from taking off my cap when entering a house or restaurant. It was impossible, at first, to remember not to click the heels together when introduced to anyone; to treat generals and colonels as mere ordinary mortals, instead of standing up when they entered and remaining so till they were seated; nor to wait till I was asked instead of saying, "Come along, where shall we go to-night?"

And then again, I had to get a complete outfit of women's clothes in Belgrade, including a small bag to take the place, very inadequately, of a dozen pockets, and I shall never forget one shop assistant's amazement when I went in uniform to try on a hat!



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My metamorphosis, too, lost me all my old pals. Though still friendly they were now quite different. Never again could it be quite the same. As I had long ago had occasion to notice, men are never quite so naturally themselves where there are women present, as when among themselves. Formerly they had been so used to me that I did not count. But now, even my old O.C., when I met him again some months afterwards, down in Southern Serbia, insisted on my going back to his house that his wife might rig me out in one of his uniforms for a couple of days. For, he said, he didn't know where he was with me, nor how to talk to me.

When I look back now upon my service it seems as though it were some previous life I had lived, and that, by some strange freak, I am still able to remember many indelible incidents; also a permanent incapacity to settle down to anything.

So I have tried to draw a simple, yet truthful, picture of my life in the Serbian Army from Private to Captain, whilst at the same time being painfully conscious of the fact that the book is full of capital "I's."

I had just finished the last chapter when, by a queer chance, I came across a well-known writer's opinion of "modern memoirs." He says, "They are generally written by people who have either entirely lost their memories, or have never done anything worth remembering."

I suspected as much before I began.



## AFTERWORD

But a month or two ago I received a telegram from a friend in the War Office, Belgrade, congratulating me on promotion. This was followed by a copy of the "Army List" of September 11th (1926) in which my name appeared in the list of 1st Lieutenants as promoted to the rank of Captain.

It seems a long time when looking back to my first promotion to Corporal. Ten years packed full to overflowing with life and adventure.

When reaching Durrazzo on the Eve of the New Year of 1916, and after the long Retreat through Albania, my Colonel gave me the choice of having my name sent up as recommended for a medal, or promotion to Corporal. Unhesitatingly I chose the latter, and no subsequent promotion ever gave me the same thrill of pride as when comrades fastened the Corporal's star on my shoulder, and half the regiment came to congratulate me. I felt then that I had put my foot on the first rung of the ladder; a long climb in the Serbian Army, even in War Time.

F.S.